NEW
NICK CARTER
WEEKLY

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DARING DAN, THE HUMAN MYSTERY

BY THE AUTHOR OF "NICK CARTER"

OR NICK CARTER'S SMOOTHEST FOE

The Chinamen stole silently up behind Nick, and then the blow fell, striking him squarely on the back of the head, so that he sank back unconscious.

Announcement. Readers of this weekly will find that the stories have been increased more than one-third over their former length. This increase is made in response to a general demand that the weekly be issued more frequently than once a week. To do that is impossible, but we have increased the length to show our appreciation of the favor with which these stories have been received. You will find that there is no drop in the quality with the increase. From this on, these stories will be the longest as well as the best of their kind published.

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DARING DAN, THE HUMAN MYSTERY

OR,

Nick Carter's Smoothest Foe.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

THE BOLDEST HOLD UP ON RECORD.

Clarence Morgan, son of one of the richest men in the city of New York, was walking rapidly past the Waldorf-Astoria at half-past ten o'clock on Tuesday evening, in the first week of the month of February.

He walked rapidly because the night air was keenly cold, and the wind, which drove furiously down the avenue, was laden with infinitesimal particles of frozen sleet which stung the skin like mosquito bites wherever it happened to touch.

It was his intention to turn into Thirty-fourth Street, and thus to enter the famous hotel, where he had an appointment with some friends, and he was already half an hour late in keeping it.

As he approached the corner where he was to turn, he noticed a group of three persons, all men, and each enveloped almost to the eyes in heavy overcoats. These men were standing in the avenue, perhaps fifty feet from the corner of Thirty-fourth Street, and seemed to be engaged in an animated discussion.

Morgan scarcely bestowed a glance upon them, more than to notice that they were there, and he was almost in the act of passing them, when one of the men disengaged himself from the group and stepped quickly forward, so that he placed himself directly in front of Mr. Morgan, effectually bringing him to a halt.

"Pardon me," he said, rapidly. "You are Mr. Clarence Morgan, are you not?"

"I am," replied Morgan, greatly astonished by the interruption.

"And you have an appointment inside the hotel, which you are somewhat late in keeping?"

"That is correct also, though how the devil you should

be so conversant with my affairs is more than I know!" replied Morgan, testily.

"Never mind that just now. I want a word with you. Step this way a moment, if you please, sir."

The stranger took him unceremoniously by the arm, and led him, unresistingly, toward the curb—unresistingly, for the reason that Morgan was so taken by surprise that it did not at the moment occur to him to resist.

Neither did he notice that the two men who had been with the stranger as he approached them followed closely behind as they crossed the sidewalk, and it was not until they reached the open door of a hack which was standing there, that it occurred to him to stop where he was, and to go no further.

He came to a sudden halt then, but it was too late.

The two men behind him crowded up more closely, so that they forced him forward in spite of himself, and at the same instant the man who held him by the arm shoved the muzzle of a revolver in front of Morgan's face with his disengaged hand, and said, quietly:

"If you make any outcry, or attempt to resist, your dead body will be carried into the Waldorf to keep the engagement, and we will escape. If you obey, we will not detain you above an hour—perhaps not so long. Get inside the carriage, sir."

There was something so determined in the quiet tone of command addressed to him, so implacable, so relentless and so uncompromising, that Clarence Morgan, although a brave man and an athlete as well, was impressed by it. He felt that the man who held the gun would keep his word if forced to extremities.

"It seems that I am to meet with an adventure," said Morgan, coolly.

"You have already met with it," replied the stranger. "Oblige me by entering the carriage without more words."

Morgan obeyed him.

He told Nick Carter afterward that he could not help it—that he had no choice but to obey.

There was the pressure of the four hands against his back, gently but firmly pushing him forward; there was the relentless grasp upon his arm, drawing him near and nearer to the open door of the carriage, and there was the unpleasant-looking muzzle of a Colt thirty-eight staring him in the face.

He had an idea, also, that even if he should call out for assistance, nobody would respond, for he could not remember that he had seen any persons near him, the moment before he was seized, save the three who now surrounded him.

"All right," he said; and without more ado, he entered the carriage.

The man who had done all the talking for the three, sprang in after him, and took the seat beside him; the others followed, and seated themselves opposite. Then the door was closed with a bang, and the carriage drove rapidly away.

It turned eastward, through Thirty-fifth Street, and not a word was spoken until it had left the avenue; even then it was Morgan who broke the silence.

"Well," he said. "What is it all about?"

"I am glad that we have not frightened you, Mr. Morgan," said the cool, suave tones of the man beside him.

"Oh! I am not so sure about that," returned Morgan. "You did something to me, and it may be that I was frightened. It is not all my nature to submit to an outrage so quietly."

"No; it is more in keeping with your nature to fight. I know that."

"You seem to know a lot," rejoined Morgan.

"We merely took you by surprise," continued the stranger. "It is a way I have. You were inside the carriage before you had time to think; and now—— Well, we will give you abundant time to think before you get out of it."

"Indeed!" said Morgan. "What is the game?"

"The game? It is called 'live, and let live.' Have you never heard of it?"

"I have heard the expression before, but I have never participated in the play."

"No? Then permit me to be your instructor."

"Sure; that is what I'm waiting for—for you to begin, for I am very much in the dark."

"The point of the matter, Mr. Morgan, is that my friends, here, and I, as well, are very much in need of ready funds."

"Oh! I see! This is a hold up. Is that it?"

"Something very much like it—yes."

Clarence Morgan was silent for a moment, thinking deeply. He was not in the least frightened, for his disposition was a fearless one; and he did not much mind the money they would rob him of, for he was very rich—and he remembered that he had very little cash with him—less than a hundred dollars, in fact."

"You're rather a cool proposition, Mr. Highwayman," he said, presently.

"It is a cool night," replied the robber, pleasantly.

"Humph! Well, you are welcome to all I have about me, if you will let me out so that I can keep my engagement. I'm late for it already."

"We are aware of that, because you kept us waiting in the cold; and realizing that you, as well as your friends at the hotel would be disappointed because of the delay, I took the liberty of sending word to them in your name that you would be detained."

"The devil you did!"

"Precisely."

Morgan half turned in his seat to look at the man beside him, but the carriage was dark, and the stranger was muffled so deeply in the collar of his fur coat that

nothing but his eyes could be seen—and they glowed, strangely brilliant, in the gloom.

"Would you mind telling me to whom you sent that message, and what it contained?" asked Morgan. "I would like to be assured that you are not lying to me."

"That word, Mr. Morgan, is one we never make use of among ourselves—that is, seriously. However, we will overlook it this time."

"All right. Then answer my question, if you don't mind."

"I sent the message to Mr. Albert Pearson, and asked him to communicate the contents of it to the two ladies who were to be present at the supper," said the stranger, in the same quiet tone he had used from the beginning.

Again Morgan half turned in his seat; but he controlled himself, and, with a shrug, resumed his former position.

"Who in blazes are you, anyhow?" he asked, with some petulance, for he had believed that his engagement for that night was known only to himself and to the three friends he was to meet, and he could not imagine how this stranger had posted himself so well.

"My name," replied the stranger, "is Derrington. Dan Derrington, if you care for all of it. Opposite me, and facing me at this moment, is Mr. Bruce Talbot, and directly in front of you, Mr. Dick Tabor. Both are friends of mine. We are, in fact, partners. We each travel under many aliases, when it becomes necessary, but I assure you that the names I have given you are the real ones."

"If you would be as liberal in showing your faces as you are in giving your names, it would be more to the point," growled Morgan.

"At the present moment, for obvious reasons, it is better to keep them concealed."

"All right. You seem to control the situation. Now, to return to the question: Will you accept what money I have about me, and let me go?"

"We want ten thousand dollars, Mr. Morgan. You will scarcely miss that amount from your many bank accounts."

"Ten thousand! Gee! Why, man, I have less than a hundred with me."

"I am quite well aware of that fact, sir; but I also know that you are in the habit of keeping quite a sum in cash in the safe in your private apartments at the Mammoth."

"Your fund of information is rather astounding, Mr. Derrington."

"Yes," coolly, "it is one of my habits to keep myself well posted."

"Well, what do you propose to do?"

"This: You may not have noticed, but the carriage has turned north. Presently we will turn westward again. Finally we will come to a halt in front of the Mammoth."

"I think I begin to understand."

"I haven't a doubt of it. We require ten thousand dollars. We need it badly, else we would not have interfered with your plans to-night."

"Pray, don't apologize."

"We require no more than that amount, and, no matter what sum you may have in your safe at your rooms, we will take no more than the sum I have mentioned."

"Possibly not," replied Morgan, with a curt laugh. "All the same, I'd hesitate to trust you."

"You will have to trust us."

"Oh, will I? Well, go ahead."

"We will stop in front of the Mammoth. I will leave the carriage and enter the house. Presently I will return with the night clerk, for I will tell him that you are in the carriage and desire to speak with him."

"And, by the Lord Harry, I will give you all away the instant he appears."

"Oh, no, you will not; for, if you do, I will kill you."

"Kill me! You would not dare to do that in a lighted street, directly in front of a big apartment house like the Mammoth."

"Make the break you threaten, and you will see. I am no bluffer, Mr. Morgan. But, to proceed: When the clerk appears at the carriage door, you will introduce me to him. You will say, in effect: 'This is my friend, Mr. Derrington. I wish you would have him shown to my apartment. He has the key.'"

"But you haven't the key."

"No; but you are about to give it to me. I am waiting for it, Mr. Morgan. Ah! Thank you."

"But my man—Joseph—will never in the world permit you to monkey around my room, and, least of all, to open my safe, even if you could do so."

"Your man—Joseph—is not there. A message has called him away, so that he will not return until you send him home. He is at this moment waiting for you outside the Thirty-fourth Street entrance to the Waldorf."

"You're a crack-a-jack, aren't you, Derrington?"

"I try to be. Now, as for the opening of the safe, I will trouble you to supply me with the combination."

"It is a mighty strange thing that you don't already know it; you know so much."

"Then permit me to assure you that the combination of your safe is one of the things I do not know—at present."

"Suppose there is not so much as ten thousand dollars in the safe?" asked Morgan.

"I am quite sure there is that much there; but if there is not, we will have to trouble you to procure the balance for us before we part company, and that might defer the keeping of your engagement still longer."

"Confound you!"

"Don't swear, Mr. Morgan."

"But, I say! Suppose there is more than that sum in the safe—what, then?"

"I will assure you that if the safe is filled to the top with cash and precious stones, I will take only ten thousand dollars. My word is good, sir."

"Humph! Well, as a matter of fact, there is considerably more than ten thousand there."

"So I have supposed."

"And do you mean to say that you will take only that much and leave the rest?"

"I have already given you my word on that point."

"And I'm blowed if I don't begin to believe that you will adhere to it."

"I certainly will, if you adhere as closely to the program I have mapped out for you."

"You must want that ten thousand mighty bad; eh?"

"We do. The loss of it will not distress you, and the want of it distresses us very greatly. See; we are approaching the Mammoth. I will trouble you for that combination, if you please."

"All right. I see I'm in for it."

"You are in so deep, Mr. Morgan, that there is no way of getting out save the one I have indicated. If I am forced to adopt harsh measures, I shall not only succeed in entering your rooms before morning, and removing therefrom everything of value—but—but why argue the matter? You are not so foolhardy as to resist. You know that I mean what I say. Now, what is the combination?"

"It is nine—nineteen—twenty-nine," replied Morgan, without hesitation.

"Ah! Nine, for the years that have passed since your graduation; nineteen for the age of a certain young lady who resides in this city, and twenty-nine for the number of your own years. I might have guessd it."

"Gee whizz, Derrington! Are you a necromancer?"

"No; I am a philosopher. I put two and two together. They usually make four, although there is sometimes a fraction wanting. Still, if one looks around for it, it may usually be discovered. Next year your combination would have been ten—twenty—thirty, if I had not tumbled to your idea, eh?"

"I say, Derrington, I'd like to ask you a question."

"Ask it."

"Are you a professional crook, or is this just an enormous bluff because you need the money?"

"Both—perhaps."

"Have these friends of yours opposite us got tongues in their heads?"

"Oh, yes; but they usually permit me to do the talking. You see, they have not the faculty of disguising their voices."

"Ah!"

"When next you hear mine you will not recognize it."

"So you think I will hear it again, do you?"

"Undoubtedly."

"Asking for another ten thousand?"

"Let us hope not; but that depends. Now, we are drawing up at the Mammoth. Are you prepared to carry out the program as I have outlined it?"

"I suppose so. There doesn't seem to be any other way."

"There is no other way. And let me remind you, that if you make any breaks while I am gone, your fate will be the same as if I were here beside you. My friends will atttend to that for me."

"Oh! I'm convinced. You will find the safe in my bedroom."

"And the money, I suppose, is in an inside compartment, to which there is a key, eh?"

"Precisely. Here is the key. I was about to tell you that."

"Thank you. It is rarely that I have to do with so considerate a man, Mr. Morgan."

"You won't disturb other things in the safe, eh? I have your word for that?"

"You have; and I will keep it."

"Blowed if I don't believe you. Go ahead. This thing is getting interesting."

"Quite like a play, isn't it?" said Derrington, as he got down from the carriage. "By the way, what is the night clerk's name?"

"What? You don't know that, either?"

"No; that is one thing I neglected."

"We call him Clarkie."

Derrington entered the hotel, and, after a moment, reappeared, accompanied by the clerk.

"What is it, Mr. Morgan?" he asked, briskly, through the open door of the hack.

"Just have Mr. Derrington shown to my rooms, will you, Clarkie. We will wait here until he returns."

"I suppose you know that Joseph has gone out?" said the clerk.

"Certainly. He is at the hotel, awaiting me. That is part of the joke."

"Ah! I see."

"Go ahead, Derrington," continued Morgan, "and, for Heaven's sake, hurry!"

"It won't take me long," replied Derrington, and he followed the clerk into the hotel.

Clarence Morgan leaned back against the cushions and laughed aloud.

"I'm blowed if this isn't the rummest sort of a go I ever heard of," he said, pleasantly, to the two men opposite him.

Neither of them made any reply, and, after waiting a moment, Morgan tried again.

"I'll give all the cash I've got in my pocket now, and it amounts to ninety-odd, if one of you will tell me why you want that ten thousand so mighty bad to-night," he said.

Again there was no reply, and Morgan slyly removed

his scarf pin, and, bending forward, drove the point of it into the leg of the man opposite him.

Dick Tabor half sprang from his seat, and at the same time uttered a hoarse oath; then he leaned forward, and, in a husky voice, muttered:

"If you try any more games like that one, I'll baste you in the jaw!"

Morgan laughed immoderately.

"Please forgive me," he said, when he could get his breath. "I did wish to know if you two were really dummies, and I had to have something for my ten thousand. I'm glad to know that you are not a wax figure, Mr. Tabor."

They were silent after that, and fifteen minutes later Derrington appeared in the door of the apartment house and crossed the pavement rapidly toward them.

"Back to the Waldorf," he called loudly to the driver, and then he climbed into the hack and closed the door behind him.

"Did you get it?" asked Morgan.

"Sure."

"Did you close and lock the safe again?"

"Sure thing. I left everything just as I found it, save for the ten thousand."

"Humph! You saw that there was considerably more than that there, didn't you?"

"Yes; but I did not count it."

"You're a rum chap, Derrington. What are you going to do now?"

"Take you back to the Waldorf."

"That's thoughtful of you; but suppose I should call a copper?"

"You won't; and, besides, it would do you no good if you did so."

"Well, then, suppose I put Nick Carter on your trail to-morrow?"

"You will be a free agent to do as you please, as soon as we part company, Mr. Morgan."

"All right. Then I give you fair warning. I'm going to set Nick Carter after you."

Derrington, who still kept his face concealed, shrugged his shoulders.

"That must be as it pleases you, Mr. Morgan; but I doubt very much if you or Nick Carter will find much in the shape of clews to help you out. I'll tell you one thing, though: "Your friend, Carter, will recognize my name. We have met in the past. However, I have no idea that he will know me now."

He leaned out of the door and called to the driver, and the carriage came to a stop a block away from the Waldorf.

"We leave you here," he said. "Good-night."

CHAPTER II.

PLOTTING AGAINST THE PLOTTERS.

"That's the story, exactly as it happened, Mr. Carter," said Clarence Morgan; and he leaned back in his chair and lighted a fresh cigar.

It was the evening following the one already described, and Morgan, having telephoned to the detective and discovered that he was at home, had called upon him to recount the adventures of the preceding night.

And the story? He had told it exactly as we already know it; and Nick Carter had listened intently to the end, never once interrupting the narrative, for he preferred to keep the questions he would ask until Morgan had completed his recital.

"So Derrington told you that I would know his name, eh?" asked Nick.

"Yes; he said you had met in the past somewhere. He did not say where."

"I once knew a Dan Derrington in Denver, but he is dead—has been dead many years, in fact. Ten or more, I think; and he was past forty years old then."

"I don't believe this chap is anywhere near forty now," said Morgan.

"Possibly he is a son of the Derrington I knew, and I might have seen him without knowing it when he was a youngster. How old was your robber, Morgan?"

"I couldn't tell. I didn't get a look at his face all the time I was with him; but from his voice I should say that he was—well, about my own age."

"Tall?"

"Yes. Six feet, or mighty near it; and straight as a ramrod. I noticed him when he walked across the pavement, too, and he was as lithe as a panther."

"Dark?"

"I think so. His eyes are, anyhow."

"The description, meager as it is, would fit the other Dan Derrington very well, when I knew him. It is quite possible that this is a son."

"I suppose Clarkie must have got a look at his face, although I forgot to ask him," said Morgan.

"Do you mean at the time when he entered the hotel to go to your rooms?"

"Yes."

"I doubt it."

"Why?"

"Because a man who was so careful to conceal his features from you, would have found a way to hide them from the clerk as well; don't you think so?"

"I suppose so."

"How much money was there in your safe at the time he visited it, Morgan?"

"Something like thirty thousand dollars."

"In cash?"

"Yes."

"Why do you keep so much money in your rooms?"

"I don't. I usually keep a few thousands there, but rarely as much as that."

"Was there anything else of value there besides the money?"

"Oh, yes. Some diamonds and other jewels. I suppose the total value of the stuff he might have carried away would foot up close to fifty thousand."

"And he took nothing but the ten, eh?"

"Not a thing. He even disturbed nothing. He kept his word, all right. A pretty square sort of a thief, all right; eh?"

"Why, yes, if one can imagine such a thing. I imagine, however, that he had a motive in the way he did this act."

"What motive could he have had more than to get the money, and to keep the promise he made to me?"

"I can't answer that question at the present moment, but I should not be surprised if he will answer it in person before you are very much older than you are now."

"You think he will come again?"

"If he happens to get short, I am quite sure he will."

"I suppose you think me a chump for letting them cart me off in the way they did."

"Not at all. Nine men out of ten would have done the same thing."

"Do you think I should have let out a yell and called for assistance when we were in front of the Mammoth?"

"No; if you had done so, and this man is the son of old Dan Derrington, he would doubtless have kept his other promise, just as he kept the one about the money."

"And shot me?"

"I haven't a doubt of it. Men like Derrington do not make idle threats. When they tell you to put up your hands, if they happen to have the drop on you, it is a good idea to get them up as quickly as possible."

"Well, this chap seemed to be very much in earnest."

"What about his voice?"

"He said it was disguised, and probably it was; although there was no sound about it to suggest such an idea."

"Some men have the faculty of altering their voices at will. I can do it. My assistant, Chick, can do it. It is merely a matter of long and constant practice. What about the other two men in the hack?"

"Nothing at all. They were as dumb as oysters until I jabbed the pin into the leg of one of them—the one called Tabor."

"He spoke then, did he?"

"I should say so. He swore like a pirate."

"Would you recognize his voice if you heard it again?"

"No. He remembered to make it mighty husky. No, I would not recognize it."

"And you could not see their faces?"

"Nothing but their eyes, and it was so dark in the hack that I could tell nothing about them."

"Were they as tall as Derrington?"

"Yes; they were all about the same height and build."

"You say they left you—where?"

"At the corner of Thirty-sixth Street and the avenue."

"Well? And what, then?"

"Derrington told the driver to take me to the Waldorf."

"You haven't told me about the driver. Did you talk with him?"

"Sure I did. I was for having him arrested, for I thought all the time that he was in it as deep as the others."

"What did he have to say?"

"Merely that he didn't know a thing about it."

"Well, what did he say?"

"That he was engaged by the hour, at Madison Square. That he was told at the time that the three men were to meet a friend in front of the Waldorf between ten and ten-thirty. That as soon as the friend came and they were all inside the hack, he was to drive through Thirty-fifth Street to Madison Avenue, thence north as far as Forty-second Street, and then by any route he chose, to the Mammoth. That was all he knew about it."

"Did he see nothing unusual in the manner in which you were ushered into the hack?"

"Not a thing. I asked him."

"You know where to find him again if you want him?"

"Certainly. He gave me his name and address. Here they are. He is usually to be seen at Madison Square, where he stands with his cab or hack until he catches a fare."

"Robert Owens, eh? All right."

Nick was silent for some time after that, thinking. Presently he asked:

"Who were you to sup with last night? Or, rather, whom did you sup with, finally?"

"Albert Pearson, his sister, Charlotte, and Pearson's fiancée, Miss Sutherland."

"Did you tell them about your experience?"

"Not a word. I intended to do so, but I changed my mind, and thought I would keep the whole thing to myself, at least until after I had talked with you. You see, Derrington sort of defied you, when I said that I should place the case in your hands; and I'll tell you one thing, Carter, I'm going to down that fellow, if it takes the rest of my life to do it, and I have to engage every detective between here and Scotland Yard on the case."

"I think we can down him in the end," replied Nick, "although he seems to have covered his tracks exceedingly well thus far."

"He was certainly the coolest proposition I ever saw, bar none."

"Tell me about your friend Pearson."

"What about him?"

"Well, how long have you known him?"

"I met him on the steamship, coming over from Southampton, last September."

"And you have known him intimately ever since?"

"No. The fact is, I have scarcely seen him at all during that time. They went West somewhere."

"They? Whom do you mean by 'they'?"

"Their party. It consisted of Pearson, his mother and sister, and this same Miss Sutherland, his fiancée."

"So they have just returned to the city?"

"Yes. I believe so."

"Did you meet them this time by accident or design?"

"Both. Pearson sent me his card, but I ran across him before I received it. Met him in the corridor at the Waldorf. But why are you so interested in them?"

"Merely as a matter of curiosity. I think you told me that you had not mentioned to anybody, the fact of your engagement to dine with them last night?"

"No; I had not."

"Not even to your man Joseph?"

"No; not even to him. I told him I was to be out late. That is all."

"And yet Derrington seemed to be thoroughly posted regarding your movements."

"Perfectly."

"He even knew what route you would take in approaching the hotel."

"Oh, that was dead easy."

"Why so?"

"Everybody knows that I spend most of my evenings at my club—the Calumet—and that, if I am not otherwise engaged, I walk from there to the Waldorf before I go home; also that I invariably use the Thirty-fourth Street entrance. That part of it was dead easy. They had only to keep an eye on me for a few days. I am a creature of habit, you know."

"Has Pearson ever been to your rooms?"

"Never."

"Does—or, rather, did, he know that you had a man named Joseph in your employ?"

"I suppose so. I might have mentioned the fact."

"Joseph was called over to the hotel to wait for you at the Thirty-fourth Street entrance, was he not?"

"Yes."

"And you found him there when you arrived?"

"Yes. He was still waiting, and almost frozen, too."

"How was he summoned? By a letter?"

"No; by a messenger boy."

"Ah! Tell me how."

"Simplest manner in the world. The messenger boy went to my rooms, asked for Joseph, and told him he had been sent by Mr. Morgan to tell Joseph that I wished him to go to the entrance of the hotel and wait there until I came. That was all. It never occurred to Joseph that the summons was a fraud."

"Are you interested in this Miss Pearson?"

"Eh? Not at all. She was a pleasant companion aboard the ship, and she's as pretty as a rose—only she's too dark for that. She's a brunette."

Nick Carter was silent again for a moment, and then:

"Mr. Morgan," he said, "I think you will find that this ten thousand dollars you have lost is merely the first installment of a series of robberies to which you are to be subjected."

"Do you mean to say that Derrington and his two friends are going to repeat that hold-up business indefinitely?" demanded Morgan.

"Well, perhaps not in exactly the same manner, but I mean very much the same idea."

"I'll be ready for them next time."

"Pardon me, but I don't think you will."

"Why not?"

"Because they are too slick for you. They will try a new dodge next time, and it will be one which you least expect. I have no doubt that you will be taken as much by surprise as you were last night."

"Then, by the Lord Harry, I'll hire a couple of secret service men to trail around after me. I'll pretend that I'm the President of the United States, or the Sultan of Turkey, or something of the kind, and invest in a bodyguard."

"And I don't want you to do anything of the sort."

"No? What, then?"

"I think the best way for me to get on the track of your robbers is to stick close to you."

"You don't say so! Well, go ahead; I'm willing."

"And we must be just as slick as they are."

"If we can; eh?"

"I think we can. Do you happen to know that the *Majestic* is due to-morrow?"

"I didn't know it, because I happen to have no interest in the matter."

"Oh, yes, you have."

"How so, pray?"

"You have a friend whom you are expecting to arrive by that steamer to-morrow."

"Eh? The devil I have! Who is he?"

"A certain Capt. Reginald Whitney, of the English Army, lately returned from India."

"I say, Carter, what are you driving at?"

"The solution of this case. You intended to return to the Waldorf after you leave me, did you not?"

"Yes."

"Very well. I wish, when you arrive there, that you would take great interest in the arrival of the *Majestic* to-morrow—and manifest it. Ascertain, as near as you can, just about the hour she is expected to dock, and all that."

"What in the world for?"

"In order that you may not fail to be on hand to meet your friend, Capt. Whitney."

"I say, Carter, you haven't been taking anything strong, have you?"

"Not at all."

"What do you mean, then?"

"Are you stupid, or don't you wish to understand? I will be Capt. Whitney."

"Oho! That's the game, is it?"

"That's the game."

"How will you work it?"

"I shall go down to Quarantine in time to board the *Majestic* when she arrives there. I shall go aboard with the doctors and as one of the doctors, but, after I get aboard, I shall find the captain and the chief steward, both of whom are well known to me."

"I'm catching on."

"Good! You are not so dull as I feared you were."

"What will you do then?"

"I shall beg the use of the captain's room while I change my clothes—and my appearance. When I come out, I will be Capt. Reginald Whitney. I shall have a grip which is plastered all over with tags, and I'll be the real thing."

"Hoop-la! That will be fun. And you want me to meet you at the pier."

"Exactly."

"I might make you a distant cousin. I've got English relatives."

"All the better."

"And you want me to make a lion of you, eh?"

"Yes; do the thing up brown."

"And I'm to let out, to-night, among my friends, that I'm expecting an out-and-out good chap on the *Majestic* to-morrow. By Jove, Carter, I'll make up a little dinner party for to-morrow night to welcome you to America."

"That's a good idea, too."

"By the way, have you ever been in this country before?"

"Never."

"Lord, what fun we'll have. Say, shall we have ladies at that dinner?"

"Suit yourself. You might include Mr. Pearson, at least."

"And where will you stop? At the Waldorf?"

"Sure; although I shall manage to be a greal deal with you. In fact, Morgan, I want you to stick close to me pretty nearly all the time, until I say keep off."

"I'll do that. I'll show you little, old New York in a way you have never seen it before. Oh, I'll do it royally! Capt. Reginald Whitney, eh?"

"Yes; I happen to know intimately a Capt. Reginald Whitney, who is in the English Army, and who is now in India; also that he has never been in New York. I will write a letter to him to-night, so if he should happen to hear that he has been in New York, he will understand."

"Capital."

"You see, Morgan, that will be the only way in which I can be intimate with you without exciting the suspicion of Derrington and his gang."

"You think they will be keeping tabs on me, do you?"

"I am positive of it; particularly after what you said to him about putting the case in my hands."

"Sure. I had not thought of that."

"We must think of everything when we are up against men like Derrington."

"He might 'drop' if you just appeared on the scene from nowhere at all."

"He would be sure to do so."

"But in this way——"

"We will fool him and all of them."

"Suppose they should find out that you had disappeared from your home, eh?"

"They won't."

"They might even send somebody here to inquire for you."

"I haven't a doubt that they will do so."

"Well, then——"

"I will be found here, prepared to answer their questions—or the questions of the person who is sent to investigate."

"But, man, you can't be here and there at the same time."

"Oh, yes, I can."

"I'd like to know how."

"My assistant, Chick, will make up to represent me, and he will be Nick Carter while I am busy on this case."

"Bully! That's great! I say, Carter, you see a deeper game in this thing than appears on the surface, or to me, don't you?"

"I think I do. A very much deeper game."

"What is it?"

"I am not prepared to answer that as yet; but it strikes me that it means a million or two of your money, and, perhaps, your life."

"Eh? The devil! You don't mean that, do you?"

"Pretty near that——"

"But if they are aiming for millions, why in the world should they bother their heads about a few thousands, as they did last night?"

"To get funds to work with. They are going to win from you with your own money—or, at least, they think they are. That ten thousand they got last night is for running expenses. When they have made a respectable hole in that, they will apply for more, and you must manage to keep some cash in your safe so you will have it to give them when they show up."

"Humph!" said Morgan. "Your ways are past understanding, but, all the same, you're bossing this outfit. We'll have some fun out of it, too."

"Let us hope that it will be all comedy, and no tragedy," replied Nick, thoughtfully.

CHAPTER III.

GETTING TO WINDWARD OF THE CONSPIRACY.

When the *Majestic* swung in at the dock in the North River, Nick Carter, in the character of Capt. Reginald Whitney, was leaning over the rail, apparently anxiously searching among the few privileged ones who had been permitted to pass the gates in order to welcome expected friends, for there was a score or more who had "influence" to get out on the pier.

Presently he discovered Clarence Morgan among those who were waiting.

He was standing between two other gentlemen, with whom he was conversing with considerable animation.

One of these, Nick had no doubt, was Albert Pearson; the other's identity he could not even conjecture.

Nick at once began to wave his hands toward that group of three, for he remembered that he had told Morgan nothing of his own description, for the very good reason that he had not decided upon it himself at the time of their conversation on the subject, and that, therefore, there would be no way for the young multimillionaire to recognize him.

But the waving arms soon attracted Morgan's attention, and the instant their eyes met, Nick shouted:

"Hello, Clarence, old chap! How are you?"

"There he is! There he is!" cried Morgan, excitedly; and then:

"Hello, Reggie! I didn't know you. You're as brown as a Hindu."

He turned to his friends, then, and Nick could see that he was playing his part to perfection. In fact, the detective had felt assured that he would do so.

"What kind of a passage did you have over?" shouted Morgan, when the ship was closer to the wharf.

"Blessed if I know, old chap," replied Nick. "Sick all the way. I'm more used to the saddle than to the deck of one of these shaky things."

Fifteen minutes later they were on the dock together, and Nick had been presented to Mr. Albert Pearson and to Mr. Forbes Maitland, his friend.

The detective regarded them both with considerable interest.

He had been suspicious of Albert Pearson from the moment when Morgan told his story, and he, therefore, felt more or less of the same thing toward any person who was announced as a friend of his.

Pearson, however, appeared to be the last person in the world toward whom anybody might feel suspicion of any kind.

He belonged to the nondescript class. He was neither tall nor short, fat nor lean. He had watery blue eyes which were very nearsighted, and, therefore, were half hidden behind thick lenses. His mustache was so thin that you might almost have counted the hairs it contained, and, like his hair, was of a molasses-candy hue.

The other man—Maitland—was different.

Nick regarded him with considerable interest, and he wondered, even then, if, by any chance, he might not be Derrington himself.

Maitland was tall, and dark, and handsome. His eyes were as black as sloes, and his hair was like the wing of a raven.

Yet there was nothing about him to suggest the foreigner. He was thoroughly American in appearance and manner.

His skin was surprisingly white for one so dark of eye and hair, and he moved with a certain grace of which any woman might have been proud.

In a word, he was an unusually handsome and attractive man. Even his voice was low and musical, and there was an air of fascination, of magnetic power, about him which made him instantly interesting.

"Do you know, Reggie," said Morgan, as they made their way along the pier toward the place where the carriage was waiting, "that I had clean forgotten about your time of arrival until I came across your letter in my desk last night. But you're here now, so it's all right."

"Yes; I'm here now, as you say, and mighty glad of it, too. You know, old chap, I have never seen this blooming town of yours before. I hope there's room to move about in it."

"Move about in it! Say, we reach further up in the air in this town than your old London extends in any direction."

"Did you book me at that hotel of yours, old man? What do you call it, the Waldorf?"

"Sure! I got you a parlor, bedroom and bath. The best in the place that could be got."

"Thanks. It was jolly nice of your friends to come down with you to welcome me. I hope you understand my appreciation, gentlemen," he added, turning to them.

"The pleasure was ours," said Pearson, glibly.

"Morgan said so much about you, captain," said Maitland, "that I wouldn't have missed meeting you for the world. One would have thought you were the Prince of Wales."

"What about your baggage?" asked Morgan, coming to a sudden halt.

"It's in the hold, old chap. I have attended to it. I travel light, like a soldier, you know. My man will look out for it. I left him aboard to attend to everything."

"Can he find the hotel, do you think?"

"He has been here before. Came over last year with Lord Curtin. Oh, yes, he knows his way around, although you might not think it to look at him."

At the Waldorf, an hour later, when Nick and Morgan were in the rooms which had been taken for Capt. Whitney, Nick asked suddenly:

"Who is Maitland?"

"Oh, he's an old friend of Pearson's. He's been around here for a month. I made his acquaintance long before Pearson showed up to introduce us."

"Indeed! How did you make his acquaintance?"

"I think we played a game of billiards together. Yes; that was it."

"And you've been rather intimate ever since."

"Quite so."

"Does he remind you of anybody you have met before?"

"Can't say that he does."

"Of Mr. Dan Derrington, in fact?"

"Gee whizz, Carter, you don't mean——"

"No, no. It was only an idea which occurred to me. Such a thing might be remotely possible, you know."

"If I could get him wrapped up in a fur coat——" began Morgan, and stopped.

"Well?" said Nick. "Go on."

"Well, your question has set me to thinking. I'm blowed if he isn't about the same sort of chap that I imagined Derrington might be. Graceful, handsome, tall and dark. If I could get him inside a fur coat with the collar turned up, so that I could see nothing but his eyes, I'd know in a jiffy."

"We'll have to try and see if we cannot do that very thing," said Nick, quietly. "There is certainly something about him which suggests old Dan Derrington, although this man is much younger than he was when I knew him—and much handsomer."

"Carter, do you really think that this is a game in which Pearson is interested?"

"I don't think a single thing about it at all at present, Clarence. I only suspect a lot of things without having the shadow of a reason for doing so. And, by the way, you must not call me Carter, or anything but Reggie, or Reginald, since you began that way. You might make a break and forget yourself at the wrong moment."

"That's so."

"If my suspicions are at all correct, it will not be long before the Derrington outfit will make another touch for your wad. If half a dozen people are living on what you can supply, it won't take long to run through that ten thousand."

"One would think, to hear you talk, that I'm a dead-easy mark."

"I shouldn't wonder if that is precisely what they think. By the way, did you arrange that supper for this evening?"

"Sure I did."

"Who will attend?"

"Pearson, with his sister and fiancée. Maitland, two friends of mine whom you have never met and need not take the trouble to remember after to-night; a friend of Maitland's whom I have never met, but whom he asked permission to present——"

"And who may possibly be one of your companions in the hack. The one you stuck the pin into, for instance. But go on."

Morgan stared for a moment, and then continued:

"Well, that's all, save the ladies, to whom you will be presented in due course. I made it rather an informal affair, and the party will just blow in from whatever place they have been at, as a Southerner would say."

They were silent for a moment, and then the detective said:

"Tell me, Clarence, how it happened, that you had your two acquaintances at the wharf to meet me. Was it your idea or theirs?"

"I think it was Maitland's."

"Ah! Indeed! That is interesting. Tell me about it."

"I mentioned to them, of course, that I was expecting a friend on the *Majestic*."

"Exactly."

"And when I said that I was going to the wharf to meet you, Maitland spoke up and suggested that they would accompany me. 'Any friend of yours is, of course, a friend of ours,' he said, 'so, if you like, we'll just go along and make the captain feel at home at once.'"

"Mighty sociable of him, wasn't it? And mighty cheeky, eh?"

"I thought so."

"But, above all, I think he had an idea it was mighty smart. You see, Clarence, if my suspicions are correct, he figured that this expected friend might be a myth, and that possibly it was Nick Carter, whom he had defied, and whom you had taken this method to introduce on the scene."

"Well, we fooled him, all right."

"Possibly; but it's just as well not to be too cocksure about it. Whether Maitland is Derrington or not, there is no doubt that Maitland is still an unusually smart chap. I'll hear from Chick some time this afternoon, and he will tell me if any inquiries have been made for me at the house. That might tell us something."

"You seem to have decided, in your own mind, that Maitland is Derrington," said Morgan.

"No; I have not. But I'm going to play this game from the start, exactly as if those two men, with their female associates, were concerned in the conspiracy which I am sure has been organized against you."

CHAPTER IV.

TRAPPED BY A WOMAN.

It was half-past eight o'clock that evening when Nick Carter stepped into a telephone booth and called up his own house.

"Well, Chick," he asked, "is anything doing?"

"Yes; you were not mistaken. It is not an hour since there was a man here to see you. I saw him, of course,

and he had a well-planned story to tell about the loss of some bonds which he wished you to find for him. He thought I was Nick Carter, all right, and I am sure that his story was a fake."

"You refused the case?"

"Sure. Told him I was too busy to consider it."

"What sort of a looking chap was he?"

"Tall and dark. Thick, rather curly hair—his own, too. Big features, not at all handsome, but rather attractive, for all that. Square jaw, deep, gray eyes. I rather liked his appearance. He looked like a cowboy who had given up the saddle for a college course, or vice versa."

"All right," said Nick. "I'll call you up again when I want you."

He hung up the receiver, but, as he turned away, he muttered:

"That fellow was one of the two who were in the hack with Derrington when Morgan was held up so scientifically."

The supper party that night, went off with great eclat. Nick, in the character of Capt. Whitney, and as the guest of honor, was, of course, the center of attraction, and he represented the character he had chosen, perfectly.

He was seated at the table, between Miss Sutherland and Miss Pearson, and he was not at all surprised to discover that each of the two young women seemed to exert themselves to be as attractive as possible, and when the party finally adjourned, Nick felt assured in his own mind that if it was Albert Pearson to whom Miss Agnes Sutherland was engaged, she was, nevertheless, in perfect accord and understanding with Maitland.

And Agnes Sutherland was beautiful after the statuesque style.

She was tall and fair, with big, wide, blue eyes which looked at you as innocently as a babe's; and her tongue was ready, and sharp as a needle when she chose to say "things."

"You are stopping here, at this hotel?" Nick asked her, during the conversation at the table.

"Oh, yes. We shall be here a month or two yet."

"Then I will have the opportunity to see you often?"

"As often as—but no; I should not say that, I suppose."

"Nevertheless, say it."

"I was about to say as often as it pleased you."

"Thank you. I shall take advantage of that statement. It is very kind of you to be so considerate to a stranger."

Again, later in the course of the supper, she leaned over toward him and murmured:

"Are you at all acquainted with New York?"

"Considering the fact that Capt. Whitney has never been in New York until now," he replied, evasively, "it is possible that he—that is I—might learn to know it a great deal better."

"And I know nothing about it at all," she rejoined. "Wouldn't it be a lark if you and I were to go on an exploring expedition some day, and get lost?"

"A most delightful lark," he assented.

"Shall we try it?" she murmured, archly.

Nick wondered what scheme she was evolving in her mind, but he replied readily:

"You have only to mention the time and the hour."

"Then let us say the day after to-morrow, at noon."

"Agreed."

"But," she said, shaking her finger at him playfully, "we must keep our secret. We must not let the others into it."

"Certainly not. But, Miss Sutherland, I suppose you understand thoroughly the risk I take."

"Risk? How so?"

"Pearson may feel inclined to call me out."

"Call you out? I don't understand."

"Pistols, and coffee, and all that, you know."

"Oh! That! Bless you, he wouldn't fight a fly."

"Not even for you?"

"For nobody. He is much too lazy."

"Well, Mr. Maitland, then. I fancy that he might."

"Oh, he? He would fight a regiment if it got in his way."

She turned away her head, then, and Nick fancied that she bestowed a quick glance of comprehension upon Maitland, which was returned with interest.

"There is something in this which does not appear on the surface," he mused.

But he thought little more about it until the time came for keeping the engagement thus made; and, as a matter of fact, he nearly forgot that as well—that is, until the hour arrived.

And nothing had occurred, pro or con, during the intervening time.

Morgan had joked with him once or twice about the situation of affairs. Once he asked:

"When do you expect things to break loose, Nick?"

"When we least expect it, Clarence. That is what I am waiting for. That is why I came here in the character of Capt. Whitney."

But when the time came for the keeping of the appointment with Agnes Sutherland, on that Friday noon, he entered the Turkish room at the appointed hour to find her there awaiting him.

"There will be something doing to-day, unless I am greatly mistaken," was his thought; but to her he said, aloud:

"Have you made any plans for our conduct to-day?"

"Certainly," she replied. "I have done little else but plan since we made the engagement."

"Indeed! Then what is our first move?"

"We will go to the Eden Musee. Have you heard of that place?"

"I have heard about it—yes. I hope, for your sake, that it is quite respectable."

"Oh, it is. We will go there, and after that—it won't be late, you know, I wish to do something that is really dreadful."

"You don't say so! What can that be?"

"I have heard that there is a Chinese restaurant somewhere in the lower part of the city which is eminently respectable, and which is very curious and entertaining. It will be early in the afternoon, you know. I would like to go there."

"H'm!" Nick cleared his throat and looked at her out of the corner of his eye, whereat she smiled upon him in her most bewitching manner.

"I told you it was dreadful," she said.

"I was only thinking," he replied, "that, perhaps, it would be better to take the entire party with us when we went there."

"Not at all. I would not think of it. No, no! We will go there this afternoon, and we will eat chop suey and have a grand time; then, when we return, we will tell the others all about it."

With all Nick Carter's astuteness and experience, it never occurred to him that there might be a trap for him concealed in this ingenuous proposition. A trap laid to catch Nick Carter in the middle of the afternoon was something which had never been attempted in all his experience, and he did not even think of it.

What he did think was that this beautiful but extremely worldly young woman was merely flirting with him in his character as Capt. Whitney, and that she was doing it in order to pave the way for some future plans of the conspirators.

And so he consented.

They started out soon after that.

When Nick offered to call a carriage, Agnes Sutherland shook her head decidedly.

"No, no," she said, with considerable emphasis. "We will walk. We will go on this expedition in a purely plebeian manner. No carriages. We will utilize the street cars—trams, I suppose you would call them. But first, we will walk from here to the Eden Musee. It is not far."

"How far?" asked Nick.

"Only to Twenty-third Street, and this is Thirty-third."

They passed two hours or more at the Musee, and all the time Miss Sutherland talked glibly to Nick.

It was three o'clock when they came out again upon the street, and in the month of February it is dark by five, or soon after."

"Now, for the chop suey," she exclaimed, as soon as they were on the street."

"Is it not too late?" he asked.

"By no means."

"I will ask this policeman how to find the place, then," said Nick.

"No, no. I have already made inquiries. I know how to find it. Come. We will take this car;" and she pointed toward Sixth Avenue.

She could not have gone more directly to the place, Nick thought, if she had been there a thousand times, and they were soon gazing at each other over two steaming dishes of the mysterious Chinese concoction.

Then, after a little while, a Chinaman, who seemed to be in authority in the place, came to inquire if they had been well served; and it was then that Agnes Sutherland inquired if it were possible for them to see the joss house.

"Certainly," replied the Chinaman, who spoke English fluently. "I will myself conduct you there, if you wish to go."

She clapped her hands together ecstatically.

"Ah! yes, we will go, and at once, will we not, captain? You will take me there? I have been told so much about the weirdness of such places that I am just dying to see one. And"—she turned to the Chinaman—"you do not charge much, do you?"

"Only what the gentleman wishes to contribute," replied the Chinaman, suavely.

Nick could not very well refuse then; and still he did not suspect a trap—that is, he had no idea that there was one to be sprung upon him at that time. He did think he saw one in preparation for the future, and that this partial flirtation was its natural predecessor, but he had no idea that he was to fall into it at once.

They started for the joss house, led by the Chinaman, who had offered to act as their guide.

The way, as the reader knows, was perfectly familiar to the detective, as was the place itself, but it was no part of his plans to betray that fact.

To those of you who have ever visited one of these places, the events which followed upon their entrance will be perfectly clear.

They climbed the winding stairs which led to the room of the joss, from which every particle of daylight is excluded, and wherein is kept constantly burning several varieties of incense, where the idol glooms down upon you frightfully.

It is an uncanny place at best. It is never light. Such lights as there are, burn behind differently colored globes, chiefly red.

There are smaller and inferior idols on every side; there are recesses, dark and forbidding, on every hand; and there are usually a number of Celestials in the place, worshiping, or engaged in assuaging the wrath of their gods.

Nick thought, when they entered, that there was an unusual number of them there that day, but still he did not suspect a trap—and so he walked blindly into it.

The Chinaman kowtowed before his joss, and then he

pointed significantly toward the box wherein contributions are placed, and Nick, to be in keeping with his character, produced a sovereign and gave it into the Chinaman's hand to be deposited.

It was at that instant that the blow fell.

The detective was standing with his face toward the joss, and well up toward it, so that the major part of the room with its dark recesses was behind him.

And out from those recesses, while he stood there, stole a dozen dark figures, silently.

They approached closely behind him, without a sound.

And then the blow fell.

It struck him squarely on the back of his head, and as he sank back, unconscious, a blanket was thrown over him, and wrapped about him, and he was lifted from the floor and borne away through the darkness.

And Agnes Sutherland laughed aloud as they bore him away.

CHAPTER V.

A PRISONER IN A CHINESE DEN.

"Well, Capt. Whitney, how do you feel now?"

Nick Carter opened his eyes and looked around him.

He had been partly conscious for the last half hour, but with a dazed sort of feeling which did not permit him to think connectedly.

Now, however, he felt that he had recovered full possession of his senses, although he was decidedly uncomfortable.

The reason for that was obvious.

He was, in reality, trussed up on a bed, in a manner which was certainly efficacious, for he was in a position which formed a perfect letter X; that is to say, his legs were stretched apart and his feet fastened with ropes to either side of the foot of the bedstead, and his arms had been drawn up over his head and served in the same manner.

The room in which he was confined was dark and forbidding, and it smelled vilely.

There was the scent of opium in the air, and also that indescribable oppression which clings to a room which is never properly ventilated.

Standing beside the bed, and smiling down upon him, were two persons.

It needed only a glance to tell him who they were, for his eyes lighted first upon the beautiful face of Agnes Sutherland, and beside her—the man, Maitland.

"I feel deucedly uncomfortable, if it interests you to know," he replied, instantly. "I would like to know why you have committed this outrage upon me."

"Merely because you happened to be in our way, captain," replied Maitland; and Nick wondered if they still really believed that he was an Englishman who had just arrived in the country, or if they had discovered his identity.

He no means of deciding that question at the moment.

If they had discovered that he was Nick Carter, they concealed the fact, for some reason of their own.

In making up for the character of Capt. Whitney, he had merely darkened his skin and hair, so that there were no wigs to remove, and nothing about him which could betray, to a mere observer, the fact that he was disguised at all.

He knew that he was helpless. He knew that he had been tied in such a manner that, even with his great strength, there was no probability that he could break the ropes which held him.

He was entirely in their power—for the time, at least—and he knew that if they were aware of the fact that he was Nick Carter, there would, in all probability, be a short shift for him.

But the detective never lost his nerve or his presence of mind.

He felt greatly chagrined to think that he had permitted himself to be so easily led into a trap by the designing young woman who had brought him there, and he wondered how he had permitted himself to be so easily deceived.

But there was no help for it now.

He had walked into the trap with his eyes wide open, and it had been sprung upon him.

He was caught—fairly caught—and it was up to him now to get out of the predicament as best he could.

"I see that I owe this unpleasant predicament to you, Miss Sutherland," said the detective, after a pause.

"No, indeed!" she replied, smiling upon him. "You owe it entirely to yourself. It is always bad policy, as you are no doubt aware, to mix in other people's business."

"How have I managed to mix in your affairs?"

He was determined still to play the part of the captain until he was sure that they knew who he really was, at least.

She shrugged her shoulders and turned away from him.

"I think, Dan," she said, addressing her companion, "that you might make him a little more comfortable."

"Ah!" thought Nick. "So I was not mistaken. This man is Derrington."

"Oh, he is comfortable enough," retorted Derrington. "It is we who should take care of our comfort, and we cannot very well do that unless we are sure that this fellow cannot escape."

He turned, then, to Nick again.

"I am not at all sure that you are what you pretend to be," he said, coldly.

"What, then, do you suppose I am? A brute, like yourself?" retorted Nick.

"Oh, we needn't call names. It will do neither of us any good."

"Very well. What do you think I am?"

"A detective."

"No! Really?"

"I should not be at all surprised if it developed that you are—Nick Carter."

"You don't say so! Who is he, pray?"

"Perhaps you can answer that better than I can. It is true that your name is on the passenger list of the *Majestic,* but it is also true that it was the last name entered, and that the ink with which it was written appeared much too fresh to have been there a matter of seven days."

"Well? And what, then?"

"I am inclined to think that you boarded the vessel at Quarantine, and came into port from there."

"You mean, I suppose, that I swam the rest of the way over. Is that it?"

"No. I mean that you went out on a tug or something, from this city, and that you were not a passenger at all until the ship arrived at Quarantine."

"You should write novels, your imagination is so good, Mr. Derrington."

Derrington started backward, as if he had been shot, and the woman uttered a little cry of consternation.

The name had slipped from Nick Carter without his really intending that it should, and yet he was not at all sorry that he had spoken it.

"So!" said Derrington, after a moment. "You know me, do you. It appears that I was right and that you are no more Capt. Whitney, of the English Army, than I am."

"So it would seem," replied Nick, shortly.

"Then you are Nick Carter?"

"I think, if you will inquire, you will find Nick Carter at his address, in the city."

"That is true, for I made the inquiry."

"You seem to have made a great many inquiries."

"Who are you, then, if you are not Nick Carter?"

"Just now, I happen to be your prisoner."

"Humph! That's no dream, mister man; and if you will accept a bit of advice, you want to take mighty good care that you do not speedily become your own corpse."

"My time hasn't come yet," retorted Nick.

"No; but it's on the way. Look out for yourself."

"Oh, I can do that, even if I am bound down to this bedstead."

"How did you discover that my name is Derrington? Tell me that!"

"The woman beside you, who has learned so well how to play the part of a lady, told me."

If the detective thought that his remark would affect Miss Sutherland, he was speedily undeceived, for she only laughed softly. Then she turned to Derrington, and remarked:

"You know, of course, Dan, that he lies."

"Certainly," replied Derrington. Then, to Nick again: "I will ask you again how you learned my name."

"I have told you."

"Oh, well, it doesn't matter, since you are beyond the power of doing harm. Do you know where you are?"

"Somewhere in the Chinese quarter of the city, I suppose."

"You are still in a room in the joss house, and you have no more chance of escaping than a rat in a badger pit."

"That is your opinion; it is not, however, mine."

"Oho! You think you can get away? Let me tell you that—but what is the use? You cannot get away unless I choose to let you go."

"And I can see that you have no intention of doing that."

"You bet your life I haven't; and if I do find out that you are Nick Carter——"

"What then; eh?"

"You'll find out what then, mister man!"

"I believe we were to be Pearson's guests at dinner to-night, weren't we?" asked Nick.

"Yes."

"I hope you will make my apologies to him. Tell him that I was unavoidably detained, if you will. Say that I found his fiancée so charming that I am constrained to lie quietly for a while."

"She whom you know as Miss Sutherland is really Mrs. Derrington," replied the man, grimly.

"And Miss Pearson? Is she also a fraud?"

"She will be Mrs. Morgan before you see daylight again—if you ever do."

"Ah! So that is the game, is it?"

"That is part of it. Would it interest you to hear the rest?"

"Infinitely."

"I suppose he has told you about the ten-thousand-dollar episode; eh?"

"Sure; and I wondered why a thief like yourself——"

"Have a care, sir! I do not like some of the words you use."

"A thief like yourself should have left the rest of the money in the safe, as you did. Why did you not take it all?"

Derrington's wife laughed aloud.

"Surely, Dan," she said, "you are not going to permit anything he has to say to move you to anger, are you? Just think how agreeable he was to me to-day. Remember how he took me to the Eden Musee, and then brought me here; and that he actually gave the joss a whole sovereign."

"Yes; a five-dollar bill would have been more to the point, only it wasn't really English, you know."

"Fire away," said Nick. "I can stand it."

"We're going to leave you now."

"Are you? How considerate!"

"I shall see you again from time to time," continued Derrington.

"I am sorry for that; but, being helpless, I cannot very well help it."

"In the meantime, you will be left in the care of the Celestials here."

"How sweet of you! And in this same—er—condition? One could hardly call it a posture, could one?"

"You will be left exactly as you are until I see fit to make a change—at least, until I find out more about you."

"I don't suppose you mean to starve me, do you?"

"Oh, no. You will be fed and watered."

"I am puzzled to know how you will explain my absence at the hotel."

"I shall not explain it. I happen to know that Morgan has no idea that you went out with my wife. No explanation will be necessary."

"Except the one I shall ask of you," said Nick.

"What's that?"

"You heard me."

"Yes; I heard you."

"Very well, hear me now. I shall call upon you for an explanation, sooner or later, and when I do, you will be looking through a grating at me; and over in another part of that same building your wife will be gazing through another one."

Nick saw the woman shudder, as if with a sudden chill. He did not know it, but she had a superstitious horror of a prison; but she only laughed softly.

"Brave talk for one in your position," she said.

"Prophetic talk," replied Nick, "as you will discover. Are you going? Really? Good-night. I have an idea that when you return I will not be here to receive you."

They were gone; and the door was closed and locked behind them.

Nick Carter was left alone in the dark, and for what fate he could not guess.

"I'm up against it this time, for sure," he thought; and then he fell asleep from sheer exhaustion.

CHAPTER VI.

NICK CARTER'S SCHEME FOR LIBERTY.

When the detective awoke he had no idea how long he had slept, but in some vague way he believed that it was far into the night.

He was stiff and sore, because of the extremely uncomfortable position he was in. His joints ached and his throat was parched with thirst.

He tried straining upon the cords which bound him to the frame of the bed, but he speedily determined that he could not break them.

"If I were in Turkey, now, or China—by Jove! I am in China, or might as well be. I had forgotten that. I wonder if Derrington can talk Chinese? Probably not; but it is plain that he has rendered these Chinamen some service of importance, for which they are willing to do his bidding."

He waited a few minutes longer, and then, raising his voice, he called, lustily:

"Hello, there! Hello, there!"

Almost instantly the door through which his captors had disappeared opened, and an ugly-looking Chinaman entered.

"Whatee want?" he demanded, imperturbably.

The detective replied in Chinese, which he spoke fluently, and to the evident very great surprise of his jailer.

"I want a drink of water," he said.

"No water; tea," replied the Chinaman.

"All right. Make it tea. That will be even better."

The Celestial departed, and presently returned with a pot of tea and a cup, which he proceeded to fill.

"I can't drink it in this position," said Nick, still using the Chinese language.

The Chinaman did not reply, but he put down the pot and went around to the head of the bed, where he proceeded to loosen the cords, so that presently Nick could sit upright, although his arms were still stretched uncomfortably behind him. Then the cup filled with tea was lifted to his lips, and he drank.

"Hungry?" asked the Chinaman.

"No; not yet. Tell me, what is your name?"

"Quong Young Low."

"What are you going to do with me here?"

"Nothing."

"What did the man and woman tell you to do with me?"

"Feed you; give you drink; wash face; not let you up so you would get your hands together. Loosen feet sometimes; hands sometimes. That's all."

"And keep me here, eh?"

"Yes."

"How long?"

"Week; month; year; don't know."

"That's pleasant to contemplate. I say, Quong, are you rich?"

"No; very poor."

"Are you going home to China some day?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"When I get rich."

"How much money will it take to make you rich?"

"Five, eight, ten thousand dollars."

Nick knew that his reply meant neither five, eight nor ten thousand dollars, but that it included the three sums added together. In other words, that the Chinaman had set himself to be possessed of those three separate

sums before he would return to his own country—and that he had a special use for them, individually.

He knew also that Clarence Morgan would not consider the sum at all, if he were called upon to pay it for Nick's liberty.

"How long will it take you to save that sum?" he asked, pursuing the subject.

"Maybe ten years."

"Suppose you could get it before to-morrow morning; eh?"

"Couldn't. Not possible."

"Oh, yes, it is. I can tell you how you can get it."

"How?"

"By giving me my liberty."

The Chinaman shook his head.

"Can't do that," he said.

"Not for twenty-three thousand dollars?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Quong Yung Low keep his word."

"Ah! Your promise to Derrington, eh?"

"Yes."

Chinamen are always literal. They will keep a promise solemnly made against every sort of bribery; but they will not extend the limits of that promise one iota.

Nick was aware of that fact, so he tried another tack.

"Did you promise that you would not carry any messages for me?" he asked.

"No; promise no such thing."

"And will you take one for me?"

"What message? Take it where?"

"To my house"—and Nick told him the address.

"What message?"

The detective knew that the Chinaman would refuse to release his hands sufficiently so that he would be enabled to write, and that he would have to resort to another expedient.

"Feel in my pocket," he said, "and take my watch. Have you got it?"

"Yes."

"Take it to my house. Ring the bell. Ask for Chick. Can you say Chick?"

"Click."

"That's near enough. Ask for Click. Say it again, so you will not forget it."

"Click."

"That's right. Ask for Click, then wait at the door till he appears. You understand?"

"Yes."

"You need not say a word to him; you need not utter a word at all. Just put the watch into his hands. Then come back here."

"Click follow me?"

"You bet he'll follow you."

"He not get in; not let him in; not find you."

"You will leave the door so that he can get in."

"No; promise keep door locked."

"All right. Keep it locked. He'll get in all right. Now, will you do all this?"

"When?"

"Now."

"How much you give?"

"A thousand dollars."

"Not enough."

"How much do you want?"

"All. Five, eight, ten thousand dollars."

"Whew! There's nothing small about you, is there?"

"No; nothing small."

"All right. You shall have it if you will do as I say."

"When do I get the money?"

"To-morrow. You will come for it to the same house."

"You pay?"

"Yes; and my promise is as good as yours."

The Chinaman came closer.

"Where you learn Chinese?" he demanded.

"In China."

"I not believe you keep promise and pay if you not talk Chinese," he said.

"I will keep my promise and pay."

"What is your name?"

"Nick Carter."

Quong Yung Low was visibly startled. He came closer still, and then, to Nick's surprise, he spoke quite plainly in English.

"You not look like Nick Carter," he said. "I have seen Nick Carter. You not look like him."

"Can you read English?" asked Nick.

"A lilly bit."

"Look inside the back case of my watch. You will find my name there. Besides, it is to my house you are going to take it. If you have any doubts, talk with Click, as you call him, and return here with him."

He looked inside the watch, and then closed the case with a snap.

"Me believe," he said, simply.

"Good! You're all right, Quong."

"Me keep word; no break it. You keep word; no break it. Allee same both; hey?"

"Yes; allee same both."

"When pay, to-mollow, hey?"

"At two o'clock, sharp."

"Me go—now. Want anything?"

"No; only to have you go as quickly as possible."

"Suppose Click not there?"

"Wait for him."

"Wait—how long?"

"Until he comes."

"Alle light; me go; me wait. Day after to-mollow, me go back to China."

And he went out, and locked the door behind him.

CHAPTER VII.

CLARENCE MORGAN'S DOUBLE.

While the Chinaman was looking at the watch to discover the detective's name upon it, he opened the front case as well as the back one, and thus Nick had been enabled to discover the time.

It was shortly after midnight when Quong Yung Low went out, and Nick figured that it should be about two in the morning before he returned with Chick—for he knew that Chick would understand.

In the meantime, the Chinaman had forgotten to draw the wrist cords back into place, and, as a consequence, the detective was not nearly so constrained in his position as he had been.

For a moment it occurred to Nick that with the slack thus afforded on the ropes, he might be able to break them, but he speedily discovered that there was no hope of that.

Strong as he was, he could not even stretch them.

But he remained in an upright position for a considerable time, and then stretched himself upon his back again, striving as best he could to keep account of the time, so that he would know about when to look for the arrival of his faithful assistant.

He began by counting seconds as nearly as he could do so, and he was determined to count to thirty-six hundred, at least, so that he would know about when an hour had passed; but before he was well along in the second thousand, he fell asleep again.

He was awakened by a crash which startled him out of his sleep so suddenly that he attempted to leap from the bed to his feet, but only to be caught by the ropes which held him, and to be jerked back again with a wrench which almost dislocated his shoulders.

But he forgot it instantly.

The crash which awakened him was caused by the bursting in of the door, and in the opening thus made stood Chick, while immediately behind him were Patsy and two policemen. Quong Yung Low was nowhere to be seen.

"Hello, Chick!" called the detective. "What did you do with the Chinaman?"

"He's outside there, with a pair of handcuffs on him, and another cop standing guard over him," replied Chick.

"What did you do that for? Didn't he lead you to me?"

Chick grinned.

"He asked me to do so," he replied. "I reckon he knows what he's about."

The ropes which bound Nick to the bed were soon severed, and the detective swung himself around and put his feet on the floor.

"You wouldn't think how stiff and sore I am," he said. "I wonder what would happen to a fellow if he was left in such a position for several days or a week? Where did you get the officers?"

"Around in Elizabeth Street. Your Chinese friend kept well ahead of me when we got near the place. Once I caught up with him, but he stopped dead still in the street, and would not budge an inch until I returned to where I was before. Then he went on, and I followed. I tried the same game a second time, but with precisely the same result. He would not speak or answer a question, and I finally made up my mind that his Chinese conscience was troubling him, so I let him alone, satisfied that he intended to lead me to you."

"Which he did?"

"Yes; but he took mighty good care to shoot into the door and close and lock it after him when he got here, so I spotted the place, and then ran around to Elizabeth Street."

"Isn't this the joss house?"

"Joss house, nit! You are in Doyers Street. Who did this little trick for you, Nick?"

"Derrington—and his wife. Never mind that now. Where is Quong? Bring him in here, and then go out and leave us alone together for a moment."

Quong Yung Low, looking rather frightened, was led into the room and deposited in a chair, facing Nick.

"You keep promise?" he said, the instant the broken door was fixed, as well as it could be done, in its place.

"Sure I'll keep my promise," replied Nick. "What are you going to do?"

"Go back to China."

"When?"

"Soon as you keep promise; when I get money."

"That will be at two o'clock this afternoon."

"Yeh; two 'clock."

"Well, now, suppose that Derrington returns here in the meantime—he'll kill you."

"Yeh; but he no findee."

"Why did you have those handcuffs put on your wrists; eh?"

"Thought mebby Dellington mightee come light away. Me go 'way when you go 'way. Me no come back. Quong Yung Low disappeal."

"Good! That's what I thought. Quong, how much money did Derrington pay you?"

"Two hundled dol."

"And how long did you agree to keep me for that?"

"Till he come back. Week—month, mebby. Not know."

"Quong, I don't believe that he intended to return at all—at least, not for a week or two; never, if he could finish up what he intended to do in that time. But if he could not, he would probably have showed up and given you another two hundred, for another week or so. Then he would have disappeared and left me on your hands.

That's his game. That's his game, and that's what I wanted to find out."

"Well, now you find out—what do?"

Nick took his handcuff key from his pocket, and unlocked the bracelets on the Chinaman's wrists.

"Now, Quong," he said, "you light out. I don't care where you go; but come to my house at two o'clock. The money will be ready for you."

An hour later Nick Carter and his assistant were seated together in Nick's study, and although it was almost daylight, neither had the least thought of retiring.

"Chick," said the detective, "if only I have guessed right, and Derrington has no intention of returning to that Chinese den where he left me, at least until he is compelled to do so by a delay in his plans, and fearing that Quong will liberate me, we've got the game in our own hands."

"It looks so."

"If he does go back there, and discovers that I have made my escape, I am afraid that he will throw up the sponge and disappear with all his friends before I can nail them."

"You might nail him now—this very morning."

"No; I don't want to do that; I want to catch all of them. I want the two men who were with him when he robbed Morgan. I want that wife of his, for if she isn't worse than he is, I miss my guess; and I want the whole outfit, the Pearsons and all, and just now I haven't a thing against them which would send them up for a day."

"That's so."

"I'm going to try a new game on them now. I'm going directly to Morgan's rooms this moment."

He crossed the room to his make-up table, and from the drawers selected a wig which suited his purposes; then a box of other paraphernalia, which he carefully packed with other things in a small handbag.

"What's the game now, Nick?" asked his assistant.

"This: When next you see Clarence Morgan, it will not be Clarence Morgan at all. It will be yours truly."

"I see."

"I'm going to let them try a little of the robber music on me."

He was soon in the street, and three-quarters of an hour later he rang the electric bell which communicated with the apartments of Clarence Morgan.

It was Joseph who opened the door to him, and as he still wore the disguise of Capt. Whitney, the valet readily admitted him.

"Mr. Morgan is not at home," he said. "He is rarely out so late. I do not know where he is."

"Did he say when he would return?" asked Nick.

"Yes; at midnight."

"Probably he was detained. He may be along at any moment. Have you been sitting up all night for him?"

"Yes, sir."

"I will go into his parlor, and wait there. When he comes in, tell him I am here. There is an excellent photograph of Mr. Morgan on his dressing table, in his bedroom, is there not?"

"Yes, sir. A very good one."

"Bring it to me, Joseph. I wish to use it."

Nick took the picture, and as soon as Joseph had returned to his own quarters in the apartment, he entered Morgan's dressing room, and began the greatest effort of his life in the way of making up.

He placed the photograph on the dresser in front of him, and then unlimbered his paints and other things with which he intended to reproduce an exact counterpart of Clarence Morgan.

He became so interested in the work, and so absorbed by it, that he forgot the flight of time, and was not conscious that he had been so long employed, until he discovered that the sunlight was streaming in at the window, and that it was almost eight o'clock.

But his work was finished, and he was well satisfied with it.

"I don't see but what it is as good or even better than I could have done with the original instead of a photograph here in front of me," he murmured. "I'll try it on Joseph, and see how it works with him."

First he looked through Morgan's wardrobe, and selected a suit of clothes which he believed would be the very thing, and the two men were so nearly of a size that it fitted him almost perfectly.

Then, when he was entirely dressed, he rang the bell for Joseph.

Having done that, he stood near the window, with his back toward the door, until Joseph entered, when he wheeled suddenly, and confronted him.

Joseph started back with a cry almost of terror; it was certainly one of amazement.

"Sir! Mr. Morgan! Mr. Clarence!" he cried, in utter consternation, "I did not know you had returned. I must have dropped asleep, although I was not conscious that I had done so."

"Perhaps I have been here all the while," replied Nick, perfectly imitating the voice of Clarence Morgan.

"And the captain? Have you seen him? He was here," gasped Joseph.

"He has gone," said Nick.

"Gone? Then I certainly must have slept at my post, sir. Will you forgive me?"

"Joseph," said Nick, in his natural voice, "I am not Mr. Morgan; I am the captain, whom you admitted two or three hours ago."

"But, sir——"

"Don't you see the difference?"

"No, sir. I do not see it at all. I can hear it, but I

do not see it. It is wonderful, sir. I would not believe it possible if—if——"

"If it were not here before your eyes; eh?"

"Exactly, sir."

"And now what do you suppose has become of your master?"

"I haven't the slightest idea, sir."

"Do you know where he was going?"

"Only that he mentioned something about 'doing Chinatown by night,' sir."

"The devil he did! Whew! I wonder——"

"What, sir? You do not apprehend that any harm has befallen him?"

"No, no, Joseph. All the same, I will not wait here any longer. But in the meantime, if Mr. Morgan should return, I wish you would ask him for me on no account to go out again until I have seen him. Will you do that?"

"Certainly, sir."

"No matter what engagements he may have, he must remain here until I return. It is of the highest importance. Do you understand that?"

"Perfectly."

Nick left the house and hurried toward the Waldorf.

It disturbed his plans greatly that Clarence Morgan was not at home to assist him in his change of plan, and he realized that now, made up as he was to represent Morgan, complications were likely to arise.

The statement made by Joseph that Morgan had had some thought of "doing" Chinatown by night suggested to him the possibility that his friend and client might have been treated to the same sort of experience which had been meted out to him.

"If that is the case," he mused, "and if by any possibility Clarence is even now a prisoner in Derrington's hands, they will think it mighty strange to see me walking in at the door of the hotel. It is a little early, to be sure, and there is small chance that any of the conspirators will be about.

"On the other hand, it is possible that they have had an all-night racket, and that while no harm has befallen Clarence, he is still with them.

"It would be rather an odd situation if I should walk in upon them somewhere, while Clarence is with them. I don't know who would be the most astonished, Clarence or his companions.

"Anyhow, now that I have made myself up, I am going to stick to the game, and see what may come of it."

He took a car downtown, and left it at the corner of Madison Avenue and Thirty-fourth Street; from there he walked to the hotel.

He noticed when he entered the famous hostelry that it was exactly nine o'clock, and he felt that no matter how late the members of the Derrington party might have been out the preceding night, there was little doubt but that Derrington himself would be astir by this time.

"And the most likely place to discover him, if he is about, will be in the bar," he continued, in thought.

But he did not approach the barroom directly.

He passed around by way of the billiard room, and secured a position where he could peer inside.

And there, leaning against the bar, with a cocktail before him, was Maitland—in other words, Dan Derrington.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FORGOTTEN INCIDENTS OF A NIGHT.

For a moment the detective did not know how to act.

Should he walk deliberately in at the bar and ask to be served? he asked himself.

He hesitated only an instant.

"If Morgan is a prisoner in some place they have provided for him, my appearance will scare him out of a year's growth," mused Nick, with a grim smile. "By Jove! I believe I'll chance it, and see what comes of it."

He stepped forward briskly, and, acting as if he had not seen Derrington at all, he stepped up to the bar.

"Hello, Johnnie," he said to the bartender. "Just put a little touch of bitters on a lump of sugar in the bottom of a glass, and fill it up with club soda, will you?"

He had purposely taken a position at the other end of the bar from where Derrington was standing, and as there were two other customers between them, there was an excuse for his not having discovered his acquaintance.

It was Nick's idea to force Derrington to speak first, but while he waited for the bartender to fill his order, he maintained a narrow watch upon the daring robber at the other end of the bar. He could do that easily by means of the mirror.

He had purposely spoken quite loud, and he had perfectly imitated Morgan's voice when he gave the order; and the bartender had replied in an equally loud tone:

"Good-morning, Mr. Morgan."

Nick saw Derrington start and turn.

He saw an expression of amazement cross his face; and then Derrington swallowed his cocktail with a gulp, and strode toward him.

"Hello, Morgan," he said. "You've pulled yourself together in wonderful shape, haven't you?"

"Never felt better in my life," replied Nick, in Morgan's voice. "What will you have, Maitland?"

"Not a thing, thanks; just had my drink."

"Better have another."

"No; not now. I say, Morgan, you're a surprise to me."

"How so?"

"Why, it isn't three hours since you were dead to the world, and now you look as if you had never heard of a night out."

"And I feel so, too. You see, I've got a jewel of a man. Joseph is invaluable. He knows just how to pull me together."

"I should say he did. I would like to have his recipe."

"Humph! Well, you know that would not do you much good unless you had your own ingredients to go with it."

"What, for example?"

"Well, the principal thing is a clear conscience. You haven't got that, you know."

"Aren't you a trifle facetious this morning, Morgan?"

"Oh, I don't know."

"I begin to think that you are something of a mystery. One would never suppose that you are the same chap whom I left, in a condition amounting almost to paralysis, three hours ago, you know."

"And yet, strange as it may seem, I am; eh? But speaking of mysteries, you can give me cards and spades in that game."

"How so?"

"Why, you're a regular all-wool-and-a-yard-wide, dyed-in-the-wool-and-made-on-a-linen-warp, human mystery, you are!"

"How do you make that out?"

"Oh, I don't know."

"I say, Morgan, I reckon that booze hasn't all worked out yet. You're a trifle leary, aren't you?"

"Maybe so. Have a drink?"

"No, thank you; no more at present. I'm just going in to breakfast."

"All right. See you later."

"What are you going to do?"

"I think I shall take a cab and go back home."

"You'll be down later, I suppose?"

"Sure."

"All right; I'll see you then."

Derrington turned hastily away, and passed through the door into the corridor, but he did not enter the café where he usually breakfasted.

Instead, he walked hastily through the corridor, toward the door nearest Fifth Avenue, and passed out upon the street.

"Now, I wonder what all that meant," mused Nick. "There was something in the wind last night, that's as sure as shooting. Derrington was plainly knocked out for a moment when he saw me standing here, and he was plainly uneasy while he stood here. Instead of going to breakfast, he has gone outside the hotel to hold communication with somebody, and who, if not Pearson, or one of the other members of his gang?"

"Whatever it is, it is certainly up to me to get back to Clarence Morgan's apartments as quickly as a good horse can take me there."

Having decided, he lost no time, but he passed through the hotel to the Thirty-third Street entrance, and took a cab from there.

"Drive me to the Mammoth," he said, rapidly, "and if you get there in as quick time as possible, there's an extra dollar for you in the fare."

The horse was a good one and entirely fresh, at that; also the man on the box was a good driver, and in a surprisingly short time for the distance, the detective got down at the door of the apartment house.

He paid the driver, and hastened into the house; and even as he entered the door, he saw a second cab turn the corner and dash around to the entrance, and through the cab door, as it swung open, he saw the face of Derrington.

"By Jove! if he hasn't come directly here!" muttered Nick, to himself.

Then he turned and made a dash for the elevator, after calling out to the clerk:

"You need not say that I've just come in, but you may send anybody up who calls."

To the elevator boy he gave practically the same instructions; and they shot out of sight toward the roof just at the instant when Derrington came in at the main door.

To hasten to the door of Morgan's apartments as soon as he reached that floor was the work of only an instant, and, in reply to his ring, Joseph opened the door almost at once.

"He has come?" asked Nick, as Joseph started back in surprise. He had not yet gotten over the effect of the detective's marvelous make-up.

"Yes, sir—and it's something awful, sir!"

"What is? Is he hurt?"

"No, sir; but he's stupefied, crazy; I think he has been drugged."

"Where is he?"

"In his room—in bed, sir. I have just got him undressed."

"Well, Joseph, I can't go to him now. There is a man coming to see him. He will ring the bell in just a moment. You have seen him before. You know him as Mr. Maitland."

"Yes, sir."

"He will ask for Mr. Morgan."

"Yes, sir."

"I am going to the library. You will bring Mr. Maitland there to me, and you will address me as Mr. Morgan, and treat me in every way as if I were really he. You understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"There is the bell now. Let him ring again before you answer. Remember, bring him to the library to me. Where are Mr. Morgan's smoking jacket and slippers?"

"In his room, sir."

"Bring them and help me into them. Hurry!"

Joseph did hurry, and by the time the bell was ringing the second time Nick Carter's feet were inside Morgan's slippers, and he had donned the smoking jacket, picked up the morning paper, and appeared as if he had been seated in the easy-chair in the library all the morning.

He also lighted a cigarette, although he rarely smoked them; but Morgan consumed quantities of them, and it was necessary that he maintain entirely the character he had assumed.

Then he heard the outer door open, and the voice of Derrington inquiring for Morgan.

"This way, sir," he heard Joseph reply; and an instant later Derrington stepped through the door and confronted him.

Nick had not supposed that Derrington's handsome face could express so much amazement.

If he had been asked about the man, he would have said without hesitation that he believed him to have almost as perfect control of his features as he himself possessed.

But now, for an instant, it was an utter blank.

Nick, however, did not give him time to speak; instead, he called out:

"Hello, old chap! Why the devil didn't you tell me you were coming out here, instead of putting up a bluff that you were going to breakfast?"

For once Derrington seemed to be without words; but after a moment he smiled rather lamely, and said:

"I say, Morgan, are there two of you?"

"Eh? Two of me? What do you mean?"

"I mean you, and the chap I just met in the barroom of the Waldorf."

"Why, I just met you there, didn't I?"

"I suppose you did. But how the devil did you get here so quickly?"

"Why, I wasn't aware that I came so very quickly."

"You look as if you had been here an hour or more."

"Do I? Well, I like to make myself comfortable. I think I told you that Joseph is invaluable. He always has things ready."

"I'll have to steal Joseph," muttered Derrington.

"My dear fellow, you couldn't; and it would not do you the least good if you did. Joseph would not serve anybody but me. Shall I ring for him? Will you have a drink? Or a cigar?"

"Both, if you don't mind. You've rather knocked me out, Morgan."

"Sorry to hear that. Joseph, serve Mr. Maitland with a brandy and soda, and place a box of cigars where he can reach them. Now, Maitland, what in blazes brought you up here so sudden?"

"I couldn't believe it was you whom I saw at the hotel, and I came up here to find out for certain."

"Did you think I had a ghost, or a double?"

"I don't know what I thought. You remember in what condition I left you, about six o'clock?"

"That's the strange part of it all, Maitland. I don't remember a thing about it."

"You don't?"

"Not a thing."

"What is the last thing you do remember?"

"Really, I couldn't say. I know that we were together. That's about all."

"And you do not recall the things you said and did last night?"

"Not a blessed thing about it."

"Nor where you went?"

"Chinatown, wasn't it? I'm not at all certain."

"Nor who comprised our party?"

"Look here, Maitland, I'd like to know what the blazes you're driving at? Why are you firing all these questions at me, as if you were a rifle and I was the target; eh? Am I up for cross-examination?"

"Oh, no; not at all; only you have effectually knocked out all my theories."

"H'm! Well, maybe that will be good for you. Too many theories are bad things to have around, aren't they?"

"You talk about my being a human mystery—that's what you said just now, down at the hotel, wasn't it? it is you who are the human mystery."

"How so, Maitland?"

"Why, you don't look as if you had ever taken a drink in your life, and at six o'clock this morning you didn't know your own name—and you'd have been dead by this time if it had not been for me."

"You don't say so! I don't remember a thing about it. You'll have to enlighten me."

"Don't you remember that you somehow got away from the party last night, and that we were a long time in finding you afterward? Don't you remember that you ran up against some sort of a proposition—that is, a gang of ruffians who drugged you and robbed you?"

Nick pricked up his ears.

"My dear Maitland," he said, "I have already told you that I haven't the slightest recollection of anything that occurred last night. If there is a hazy sort of memory about some of the things, I would rather forget them. And now, if you don't mind, we'll change the subject."

"Oh, certainly. If you have forgotten everything else, I suppose you have also forgotten that you were angry at me, and that you said some very unpleasant things to me?"

"I have no recollection of it whatever. If I said things you didn't like, you must pardon them; that's all."

A bland smile crossed Derrington's features.

"Sure," he said. "But there was one incident of the night which you should remember, for if you do not, it will doubtless be brought to your attention in a very unpleasant manner."

"Eh? What was that?"

"I tried my best to prevent it; but you were determined."

"What was it, I say?"

"Don't you remember that we drove to an old church in Hudson Street, and from there to the parsonage? Don't you remember that there was a marriage ceremony performed there? And have you forgotten—quite forgotten—that Miss Agnes Sutherland, of yesterday, is Mrs. Clarence Morgan of to-day? Have you forgotten that you were married last night, and that Albert Pearson, who was her intended, fought his way into the parsonage just as the ceremony was completed, and that there was an awful row, during which your wife fled from the room? Have you forgotten how we searched for her, and discovered finally by telephone that she had returned to the hotel? Great God! Morgan, you must not forget that, for she is waiting there now for you to go to her."

CHAPTER IX.

THE INTRICACIES OF DERRINGTON'S PLOT.

The cat was out of the bag at last.

The inner wheel of the plot against Clarence Morgan was revealed to view.

Nick Carter closed his eyes and leaned his head against the back of the chair in which he was seated, in order to conceal effectually the gleam of pleasure which he knew must appear in them, and which Derrington would be sure to notice.

In that moment the detective thanked his stars that he had fallen into the trap which that same Miss Sutherland had set for him in the joss house.

But for that incident, and the resulting events, he would still have believed that Miss Agnes Sutherland was Miss Sutherland; but because of that affair, he knew that she was already the wife of the man who sat there facing him, and coolly informing him of the marriage ceremony performed somewhere in Hudson Street.

And now, before him, he could see the whole scheme of these schemers.

He could see that Clarence Morgan's life was not worth a farthing if he again fell into the power of these plotting fiends.

He knew that it was no part of their plans that there should ever be the relation of husband and wife between Clarence Morgan and the woman he had married; but that beyond the shadow of a doubt it was their intention to have her pose as a new-made widow, possesed of a marriage certificate and supplied with witnesses who could swear to the genuineness of the marriage.

He wondered in that moment that was given him for thought if these plotters had gone so far as to induce Morgan to make any sort of a will; but he dismissed that idea almost at once.

"No," he mused, "that would be going too far, and Derrington is smart enough to be aware of that fact. The dower is all they are aiming at. A life estate in one-third of all that Clarence Morgan is possessed of would mean several millions, and Derrington means to settle that with the estate, after Clarence is dead, by accepting the payment of two or three millions in cold cash.

The same game has been successfully played before, and he argues that it can be done again."

"Do you remember any part of those incidents?" asked Derrington again, incisively.

Nick pretended to rouse himself with an effort; and after a moment he replied, with a deep sigh:

"It is all lost in a sort of a haze; but——"

"But you do remember, eh?" demanded Derrington, eagerly.

"Partly. Partly. Not entirely."

"You recall the ceremony?"

"I remember something of the row you refer to, and the escape of Miss Suther——"

"Pardon me; Mrs. Morgan, you mean."

"All right. Call her that if you like, although it sounds like a huge joke to me now."

"It won't sound like a joke to her, I can promise you."

"So I really married her, did I?"

"You certainly did."

"And she's got the certificate, and all that, I suppose; eh?"

"Naturally."

"How did it happen?"

"Why, man alive, you wouldn't have it any other way. She tried her best to put it off until you were thoroughly yourself, although I must say that you appeared as if you knew exactly what you were about at the time."

"Strange that it is all so hazy in my recollection."

"The minister saw nothing strange about your conduct. You appeared all right when you were in his presence."

"I can't understand how she consented to the ceremony," mused Nick, aloud.

"Why, man, you swore that you had loved her from the first moment you saw her, and she admitted that she had felt the same way. After that there was nothing for you but to get married at once. You would hear of no delay. You besought me to add my arguments to yours, and I called you aside and tried to reason with you. I might as well have tried to reason with a block of wood. You would hear of nothing but having your own way, and at last I reluctantly consented."

"Humph! That was very—what shall I say? kind of you, wasn't it?"

"I could do nothing else. You threatened all sorts of things if she did not consent, and if we did not go with you to see you married."

"Where was Pearson all this time?"

"Don't you remember that he did not go downtown with us? That he sent word at the last moment before we started that he was unavoidably delayed, but that he would join us later?"

"No; I don't remember that, either."

"Your spree seems to have driven everything out of your head, even the things which occurred before you got your load."

"And Pearson did show up later, did he?"

"He appeared just as the ceremony was completed. That was when the row occurred. Somebody in the restaurant who had overheard the arrangements told him where we had gone, and he followed us."

"I see. I see."

"When I met you in the bar at the Waldorf this morning, I was frightened nearly out of my wits lest Pearson should walk in, and you two should have a knock-down and drag-out set-to, right there; but I saw that you had forgotten all about it, and that is why I came up here at once."

"But you left me there, all right, to meet Pearson if he happened to come in."

"Oh, no, I did not. I started to do so, but I went back after you, and you had gone."

Nick knew that this was a lie; he knew that Derrington had had doubts of his identity at that moment, and had hastened to the Mammoth to assure himself that there could be no mistake.

"Have you seen Miss—er—that is, have you seen my—er—wife—this morning?" he asked.

"I have talked with her over the telephone connection between the rooms in the hotel."

"And what did she say?"

"She is very sad; very much frightened; very nervous. She thinks you will hate her for what happened last night."

"Hate her? Why should I? If she is my wife, that is all there is about it. I haven't much recollection of the affair, but if it is all true, I'll stand for it. Look here, Maitland."

"Well?"

"I don't want to hurry you away; but——"

"Well, old man, what can I do for you?"

"I want you to get back to the hotel as quickly as you can, and wait there for me."

"You will go there, then, and see her?"

"At once. Within an hour."

"Suppose she should refuse to see you?"

"Then, by the lord Harry, if she is my wife, I'll find a way to make her see me. I want to get this story from her own lips."

"And after you have heard it from her—what then?"

"I'll tell her to pack her things together, and we'll take the first steamer for Europe. We'll have to do something of that sort in order to get acquainted. We'll catch a steamer this very day, if possible; if not, then one to-morrow."

"You've got sand, anyhow, Morgan. I hardly expected you to accept the whole thing so readily, especially after I saw that you had forgotten it all."

"When I dance, I pay the fiddler, Maitland; and when others dance, I expect them to do the same," replied Nick, significantly. "Now will you go and do as I ask?"

"Yes; at once."

"Tell her that I will be there in an hour, and that if she does not receive me at once, I will repudiate the whole thing, even to the extent of declaring it a fraud. I mean that, and now go, if you wish to see this thing come out right."

He took his departure at once, and Nick hurried to Morgan's bedroom, for it had suddenly occurred to him that these plotters might already have poisoned his friend, and that Clarence Morgan might even now be dead, or dying.

CHAPTER X.

BEGINNING TO REAP THE WHIRLWIND.

When the detective entered the bedroom, Morgan was sitting up in bed, with his hands pressed against his throbbing temples.

He was the picture of misery and despair, and Nick stepped hastily toward him to render what assistance he could.

But Morgan removed his hands from over his face, and raised his bloodshot eyes to Nick; and then he uttered a yell which would have put a Comanche Indian to the blush, and pulled the bedclothes over his head in abject terror.

Nick Carter halted in dismay; and then he remembered, and he could not help smiling when he understood the cause of Morgan's fright.

The detective had forgotten for the moment that he was made up in exact and precise representation of the man in the bed, and he no longer wondered that Morgan had been startled almost out of the few senses which remained to him upon seeing his own apparition come in at the door.

"Brace up, Clarence," he said, genially, approaching the bed, and placing one hand on the trembling man. "It is only I—Nick Carter. I have made myself up to look like you, that is all."

Morgan's head slowly emerged from beneath the bed covers, and he stared at Nick in wide-eyed astonishment, in which terror was still largely mixed.

"Blowed if I didn't think I was dead, and that my own ghost had come to mock me!" he muttered.

"How do you feel?" asked Nick.

"Feel! Feel! I feel like — Say, Carter, I can't just now think of anything quite bad enough to express how I feel; but you can guess. Dante's dream was a joke to this."

"Do you know what happened to you last night?"

"Sure I do. Part of it, at least."

"Do you know that you were drugged and robbed?"

"Yes; I remember that all right; but I couldn't help myself. And say, the fellows who did it were the same ones who were in the hack with Derrington that night they touched me for the ten thousand. I'd swear to it on a stack of Bibles a mile high."

"Talbot and Tabor, eh?"

"Sure thing."

"Did they get much?"

"No; a couple of hundred, my watch, my ring and a stud."

"Did that happen before or after you were married?"

Nick asked the question quietly, as if the matter had already been discussed between them, and Morgan stared at him in open-mouthed amazement.

"So!" he said, presently. "It is true, then?"

"What is true?"

"That I was married last night; eh? It is true? Eh?"

"So it would seem."

"How the devil did you know about it? Were you there?"

"No; if I had been, it would not have happened."

"How did you find it out?"

"Never mind that now. My appearance should explain that to you. But you do remember it, do you?"

"Yes—but rather hazily. It was Miss Sutherland, wasn't it?"

"Yes; only I happen to know that she was Mrs. Derrington before she pretended to become Mrs. Morgan."

"Eh? Gee whizz! Glory hallelujah! Say, that is the best medicine you could have brought to me."

"I thought it might be."

"We'll have her up for bigamy; eh, Nick?"

"We'll see about that."

"Look here; what was her game if she was already married?"

"She wished to become your widow."

"She wished to—what the dev——"

"I think Derrington and his crowd mean to murder you quietly, some time to-day or to-night. That is what I mean."

"I say, Carter, you're a comforting sort of a chap to have around, especially when my head is bigger than the Statue of Liberty."

"I'm not joking, Clarence. That is their game. They've got the marriage certificate and all the necessary witnesses. Once you are dead, they would have no trouble in establishing their claim—that is, they would not have had any if they hadn't jumped a little too far in one direction. Didn't you miss me last evening?"

"Sure! Where were you?"

"Lying on my back, bound and helpless, in a Chinese den not far from the section you visited. Derrington thought Capt. Whitney was in the way, and he thought he got me out of it. He was so sure that he had done so that he did not hesitate to introduce Miss Sutherland to me as his wife."

The detective began then at the beginning, and told Morgan everything that had occurred up to the merest detail.

"And now, Clarence," he said, in conclusion, "you've got to act under my orders for a little while."

"Sure. It's a cinch that I'm in no condition to act under my own after what has occurred. But I want to tell you one thing: I did not drink much last night. I never do. It was that confounded knockout they gave me which did the business."

"I know that. You don't have to tell me."

"Now, what do you want me to do?"

"I want you to get into your clothes, and ride with me to my house, and I want you to remain there, without even looking out of the window, until I come after you."

"Do you suppose I can get there? I haven't got a leg to stand on."

"I'll take you there all right, and I'll send for the doctor the moment we arrive. He'll pull you out all right."

"What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to let them try to murder me in your place."

"You don't mean it!"

"Sure I do."

"Do you really think they intend to go as far as that?"

"I am certain of it."

"And you are going to be Clarence Morgan for the day; eh?"

"Yes; and for the night, and possibly two or three days and nights, although I think I have said enough to force them to act without delay."

"And you'll gobble the whole lot of them, won't you?"

"I think I will. But first I'm going to take you to my house; after that I'm going to make a call on the woman you were supposed to marry last night."

"By the Lord Harry! but I would like to be a spectator to that scene."

"You can't be one. I'll send Joseph to you now. Get into your clothes as quickly as you can, for I am due at the Waldorf in an hour."

The preliminaries for Nick's future acts were soon accomplished.

He took Morgan to his house in a carriage with drawn curtains, called his own doctor, and left him there. Then he drove boldly to the Waldorf, and sent his card to Miss Sutherland—that is, he sent up one of Morgan's cards.

As he was turning away from the desk, he came face to face with Derrington and Pearson, and he knew at once that they had been on the lookout for him.

"Hello, Maitland!" he said, purposely ignoring Pearson; but the latter stepped forward, and extended his hand.

"I say, Morgan," he lisped, "there's no use crying over spilt milk, is there? We had a sort of a row last night, but I'm willing to let bygones be bygones, if you are. I got the worst of it because I lost my sweetheart; but I realize that there is no help for it now. Shall we be friends?"

"Sure," said Nick, smiling.

"You're a wonder, you are!" exclaimed Pearson, with genuine admiration.

"Why so?"

"I never would have believed that a man could have pulled himself together as you have done it, and in so short a time."

"Well, you see you haven't got Joseph."

The hall boy approached at this moment, and interrupted them.

"You are to go right up," he said to Nick. "Miss Sutherland and Miss Pearson will receive you in their parlor. Fifth floor, sir."

"Very good," replied Nick.

Then he drew Derrington aside, and whispered in his ear:

"I say, Maitland, was Miss Pearson present at the ceremony last night?"

"Sure thing. Do you want me to go up with you, Morgan?"

"Not in a thousand years; thank you, all the same. And I don't want Miss Pearson there, either. I wish to see my wife alone."

"I hardly think that you can drive Miss Pearson out."

"Then I'll balk, that's all. I'm perfectly willing to accept the situation as it is, but I've got to be boss, or there's nothing doing; you understand?"

"Yes; go ahead. We'll wait for you in the billiard room."

"All right. I don't suppose I'll be very long."

Five minutes later he entered the parlor where the two young women were awaiting him.

He closed the door behind him, and paused in the center of the floor, facing the two women, who had risen to receive him.

"I believe I have the pleasure of bidding my wife good-morning," he said, with an enigmatical smile on his face. "And you, Miss Pearson; I hope you are well after the adventures of last night?"

Miss Sutherland came rapidly forward, and stretched out both hands.

"Clarence," she said, "is it true—that you—are not—angry?"

"Certainly it is true. Why should I be angry?"

"I did not know; I did not know what you would think of me when you remembered," she faltered.

Plainly, she had schooled herself to play her part to perfection.

"I think I'm a trifle feazed, Agnes," said Nick, dropping into a chair. "Moreover, I'm a bit shaky this morning; but you will not be surprised at that."

"And you remember all about it, do you? Mr. Maitland said that you had forgotten it when he saw you, but that you recalled everything that had happened as he talked with you."

"Yes; it all came back to me."

"You must think that I—that I am very fickle to give—to give up Mr. Pearson in the way I did, and——"

"Never mind all that. Pearson and I have just shaken hands over the bloody chasm, so to speak. The question is, when will you be ready to sail?"

"Sail! Sail where?"

"For Europe. We've got to get acquainted, you know. Do you think you could get ready by three o'clock this afternoon?"

"Oh, no, no, no, no, no!"

"Well, by three o'clock to-morrow, then? I won't wait any longer than that."

"I'll try," she replied, brightening visibly.

"It is plain," thought Nick, "that they have decided to do the murder act to-night."

Then he turned to Miss Pearson.

"I beg your pardon," he said to her, "but would you mind leaving me alone a moment or two—two will do, I think—with my wife?"

"Mrs. Morgan has requested that I remain with her during your call," replied Miss Pearson, coldly.

"Indeed! Well, Mr. Morgan requests that you leave the room, and if you do not, Mr. and Mrs. Morgan will leave you in possession of it, and go elsewhere," said Nick, harshly.

"Go, Charlotte," said Agnes. "In two minutes you may return."

"Now," said Nick, when they were alone, "I wish to know from your own lips the truth of how this happened; and I may as well tell you that your reply may have a considerable effect upon your future."

To Nick's utter astonishment, the woman before him burst into tears.

She threw herself back upon the chair from which she had risen at his entrance, and wept, wringing her hands together frantically.

There was no acting about this, and Nick Carter knew it.

"Tell me," he said.

"I cannot! I cannot! Really, I cannot! Don't ask me. Go! Go away! Come here to-morrow after me, at noon, and as true as there is a God in heaven, if you can do that, I will go with you to the steamer and to Europe—ay, to the end of the world, if you ask me. But go! Go! And, Clarence, if you receive a strange message—one which you do not at all understand—at your rooms, before night, heed what it says. Heed it. I beg of you. Now go! Do not ask me a question, for

I cannot answer now. Here is Charlotte. Go! Go without a word!"

Marveling—for even Nick Carter was at fault because of this strange turn of affairs—he passed Charlotte Pearson with a silent bow, and left the room.

"By the Lord Harry, as Morgan would say," he muttered, as he walked through the hall toward the elevator, "I believe she intends to send me a warning of what is to happen to-night. If she does—well, I will wait and see whether she does or not."

In the billiard room he found Derrington and Pearson awaiting him.

"Well?" asked the former. "What happened?"

"Nothing startling. We accepted the situation, that is all."

"And what will you do?"

"Do! Why, just as I told you I would do. We will sail for Europe at three o'clock——"

"What? To-day?" cried Derrington, leaping to his feet.

"No; to-morrow," replied Nick, smiling; and to himself he added: "That settles it. They will try to do the act to-night, and they'll find themselves done a little bit browner than the richest Thanksgiving turkey they ever saw."

CHAPTER XI.

THE FIGHT IN THE SUPPER ROOM.

"Look here, Morgan," said Derrington, after a short pause, "I'll tell you what you might do to entertain us to-night."

"What, for instance?" asked Nick.

He knew now that the moment had come when he was to learn the beginning of the last part of their plot to do away with Clarence Morgan.

"Well, you're going away on your honeymoon to-morrow. That is settled, isn't it?"

"Quite so."

"Then I suggest that you give our party a little supper at your rooms to-night. A stag party, you know, of course. You ask in one or two of your own friends, eh? And——"

"No; I don't care to do that. I don't want anything known about this affair until I am far out on the briny."

"Oh! All right. I was about to say that I have two friends whom I would like to bring along, since they are both known to the bride, and are really capital fellows."

"Bring them, by all means, and we'll have the supper," rejoined Nick, realizing instantly that Derrington referred to his confederates, Talbot and Tabor; and he asked for nothing better than to have them there. It would save him the trouble of searching for them later. "Shall we say ten o'clock?"

"Good! That's just the hour I would have suggested. Then there will be Pearson and I, and my two friends; eh?"

"Just two more," said Nick, smiling. "You forget that I will be there; and I have just one friend whom I will ask."

And so it was settled.

As soon as Nick parted with Derrington and Pearson, he went to the telephone booth, and called up Chick.

"Get a move on you now, lad," he said. "I want you to get the inspector to let you have two good men—two who can put up a good scrap if they have to do so—and bring them to Clarence Morgan's rooms at five this afternoon. That will give us time to have our supper and to lay our plans for the evening. I'll tell you all about it when you arrive."

"All right. We'll be there."

"Don't forget Quong Yung Low. He'll be at the house at two. You had best draw the money, and give it to him in cash. I haven't told Morgan about it yet, but he will make it good."

He left the hotel then, and hurried to his—or rather, Morgan's—rooms.

There he gave the astonishing order for two suppers—one for four persons, to be served at half-past five, and the other for six persons, to be served at ten. Not that he expected himself to eat two suppers, but that he wished to have his own repast out of the way before the events of the evening began to happen.

Joseph he posted thoroughly, and was delighted to find that the valet did not object to taking a hand in the fight himself, if the opportunity should offer.

"Really, Joseph," he said, "I need not have told Chick to bring more than one man from the central office; but an extra one won't be in the way, and I shouldn't wonder if there would be a little gun play before this thing is over."

At four o'clock in the afternoon a messenger boy brought him a letter.

It was addressed to Morgan, but Nick had not a doubt that it was from his pseudo wife, and he opened it at once.

"My husband," she began, and Nick started, wondering if after all she was really Derrington's wife; and he muttered to himself: "There is a possibility that she is Mrs. Morgan, after all."

Then he continued reading the letter.

"I intended at first to write to you anonomously," she said, "but I have decided to be perfectly frank, and tell you all. I am the sister of the man whom you know as Maitland, but whose real name is Dan Derrington. This has all been a plot against you. You are to have a supper party at your rooms to-night, and during that supper you were to have been poisoned with a concoction which, should you die, would leave only traces behind it of apoplexy; the best of physicians would be deceived. I have been in this plot from the first. I desire to conceal nothing from you. I am not really wicked; I have been forced to these acts by my brother. Save yourself, Clarence. I have no hope that you will care ever to see me again, but if you should, to-morrow, or a year, or ten years from now, you will find me waiting for you, and true to you, and you will never have cause to feel shame for me for the past—save for this awful thing—or for the future. I might plead with you, but I only sign myself, YOUR WIFE."

"Gee!" said Nick. "Here's a howdy-doo! I wonder how Clarence will take that?"

* * * * * * *

Chick and the two officers arrived in due time, had their supper, and afterward the two men from the central office were installed in the bedroom to await developments.

At a quarter before ten, Derrington, Pearson and the two confederates put in an appearance.

The table was already laid, and after chatting idly for a while, supper was served.

The meal progressed swimmingly until the moment came when the Burgundy was served. Then Derrington rose from the table, and began to examine the paintings on the walls.

"Come here, Morgan," he called, "and tell me what this is;" and as Nick rose to obey, he saw that Pearson had engaged the attention of Chick—or thought he had, which amounted to the same thing; but he knew that Chick would see all that passed.

"Now is the moment for poisoning the wine," he mused; and he was right, for he had barely crossed the floor and reached the side of Derrington, when there was a loud exclamation from the table, followed by the sound of a scuffle, and the noise of breaking glass.

Chick had seized the phial filled with poison, just as Tabor was in the act of dropping some of its contents into Nick's glass, and he wrenched the bottle from the poisoner's hand, and passed it behind him to Joseph, who stood in readiness to receive it.

At the instant the scuffle began, Nick seized Derrington, lifted him from the floor, and attempted to throw him, but he discovered, to his surprise, that Derrington was almost as powerful as he was himself.

At the selfsame instant, the two officers leaped into the room from the bedroom, and, with drawn revolvers, ran toward the table where Chick, assisted by Joseph, were struggling against Pearson, Talbot and Tabor.

Tabor and Talbot received a rap on their heads at the same instant from the butts of the officers' weapons, and Chick delivered a blow against Pearson's jaw which put him out of business effectually.

Then, with one accord, they all turned toward where Nick was fighting with Derrington; and just in time to see the detective gain the upper hold, lift his man clear of the floor, and throw him, like a bag of meal, upon it.

And as he did so, Nick fell upon him; and in a trice the handcuffs were slipped upon the fellow's wrists.

The battle was won, and won easily.

And then, with great deliberation, Nick secured a sponge and some water, removed the wig from his head, and washed away the traces of Clarence Morgan's likeness.

"I'm very sorry that Morgan is not here to receive you, gentlemen," he said. "I am Capt. Whitney; otherwise, Nick Carter, whom you defied that night when you held Morgan up for the ten thousand plunks."

This is the end, reader. It only remains to be said that Morgan absolutely refused to see his wife or to have anything to do with her, save in the one thing, that he sent her word through Nick Carter that he would provide liberally for her. This, however, she refused to accept, and when next he sought to communicate with her, she had disappeared.

THE END.

Next week's issue, 426, will contain "Dan Derrington's Double; or, Nick Carter's Terrible Test."

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